BUSINESS / B1
Sun Life, GSIS drop out of race to bid for Philamlife

ACROSS / A15
Terror suspect, 12 others bolt Sulu jail thru 10-ft tunnel

WORLD / A21
Bush says he, Laura likely lost money in financial crisis

WORLD / A21
Investment adviser in US caught after trying to fake death

GMA appoints Erap 'plunder judge' to SC

By Christian V. Esguerra

A MAGISTRATE WITH A REPUTATION for being a "palitician judge" who convicted former President Joseph Estrada of plunder is the newest member of the Supreme Court.

President Macapagal-Arroyo, the main beneficiary of Estrada's ouster in 2001, yesterday announced the appointment of Sandiganbayan Presiding Justice Efraindado Penalta as associate justice of the 15-member high tribunal.

GMA APPOINTS A1

Leviste: The 'promise' that never came to be

By Michael Lim Ubac

WHEN HE WAS YOUNG, JOSE ANTONIO "Tony" Leviste was seen as a beacon of hope for Batangueños, according to Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr.

Pimentel recounted how Leviste started out as a "pioneering" politician in his

LEVISTE A4

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BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS

Thursday, January 15, 2009 ★★ 6 sections / Vol. 24 / No. 38 P15 website: www.inquirer.net

Leviste found guilty of homicide; gets 6-12 years in jail

BIG SMILE Former Batangas Gov. Antonio Leviste smiles broadly for the cameras when he arrives at the Makati City Regional Trial Court before Judge Elmo Alameda finds him guilty.

By Allison W. Lopez

HOW DID HE COME TO THIS?

He was described as a breath of fresh air when he first emerged as a politician, climbing in a breeze to the top of the political hierarchy in his province.

Yesterday, Jose Antonio Leviste, former governor of Batangas and estranged husband of a popular senator (See profile on this page), was found guilty of homicide in the killing of his longtime aide Rafael de los Alas two years ago. He was sentenced to 6-12 years in prison.

A lone shot would have justified Leviste's claim for self-defense, said Judge Elma Alameda. But four bullets pumped to the head of De los Alas demolished this assertion, said the presiding judge of the Makati Regional Trial Court.

The bloodied De los Alas was found slumped on his seat, with a gun drawn from his waist and his finger near the trigger, inside Leviste's office in Legaspi Village on Jan. 12, 2007.

Leviste, who admitted killing his friend but said he did it to save himself, presented seven witnesses who testified on De los Alas' supposed "violent behavior."

The former governor claimed he life had been threatened shortly past noon when he reportedly shot at an angry De los Alas, who was allegedly demanding P1 million for a mistress.

He surrendered to Makati

LEVISTE A6

SMALL COMFORT Tearful widow of the man Leviste killed, his longtime associate Rafael de los Alas, Teresita de los Alas (left) and daughter Diana hold on to each other during the reading of the verdict.

Puno calls for moral force

Ombudsman: 10 prosecutors involved in case-fixing

By Erika Sauler and Edince C. Tandoc Jr.

ABOUT 10 PROSECUTORS handling various cases are involved in the alleged "cases for sale" at the Department of Justice (DOJ), Ombudsman Merceditas Gutierrez told reporters at a forum yesterday.

Gutierrez said her office, together with the National Bureau of Investigation, was already looking into reports she received that several prosecutors were engaged in case-fixing.

"I'm ill not be specific. We cannot divulge details yet because it will derail the investigations," she said.

Gutierrez said she got the information on the issue of the alleged bribery at the department for the release of the "Alabang Boys" bodyguards.

"I cannot recall if it's before

OMBUDSMAN A6

GREAT EQUALIZER Ordinary folks and VIPs stream in and out of the wake for Mary Ejercito, the mother of ex-President Joseph Estrada. Former President Cory Aquino, accompanied by her son Sen. Noynoy Aquino, condoles with the Estradas family on Wednesday afternoon. But on that point Estrada was still closeted in his home on Polk Street, Greenhills, and has yet to come to the wake at the St. John the Baptist Parish in San Juan City. "He's not talking to anyone," says his son, Mayor JV Ejercito. (Story on Page A4.)

It shouldn't be invisible, says SC chief

By Philip Tubeza, Nikko Dizon and Dona Pazzibugan

AMID TALK OF A PLOT TO UNseat him, Chief Justice Reynato Puno yesterday spoke about the need for a "moral force" in the country.

Puno said it was not the legal system that could solve the country's problems but the moral concern.

Before speaking to a group of businessmen last night, the Chief Justice said religious leaders should step forward and act as "moral forces" in "redirecting the destiny" of the country as it was suffering from moral decadence.

Puno also said he was ready to face any attempt to impeach him.

"It is very obvious that the main problem of the country is moral decadence. This is the root cause of the density of power, corruption problem," Puno told reporters before talking to the Ateneo business group in Ortigas, Pasig.

"You look at it more deeply. You look at it from its various dimensions. That's why ... it's time for the moral forces of the country to manifest themselves. They should cease to be an invisible force. They should play a dominant role in redirecting the destiny of our people," he added.

PUNO A6

Gonzalez: Marcelino's acts not valid

By Dona Pazzibugan and Tarra Quismundo

MARINE MAJ. FERDINAND MARCELINO's drug-bust operations for the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) could be considered "unconstitutional" since active duty military officers like him are barred from holding positions in a government agency, according to Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez.

"As far as I'm concerned the acts done when you're not authorized should not have any bearing whatsoever (because) you have no authority," Gonzalez told reporters yesterday.

He quoted Article XVI Sec. 5 paragraph 4 of the Constitution that provides that no active military officer may be appointed to any capacity in any civilian office including government agencies.

Marcelino said he was appointed to

GONZALEZ A4

In Year of the Ox, 2 seers bullish on RP amid gloom

By Tina Arceo-Dumlao and Erika Sauler

ONE READS THE CHINESE ZODIAC, the other watches the stock market, but these two "seers" agree: Filipinos weighed down by last year's economic slump still have a reason to be bullish in 2009.

Because all the elements of metal, wood, water, fire and earth are coming together in the coming year of the Yin Earth Ox, the Philippines can expect a very

IN YEAR A9

WEIRD WEATHER

9 dead in flash floods, storm surges, landslides

By the Inquirer Bureau

FLASH FLOODS, STORM surges and landslides triggered by heavy rains across the Philippines have killed at least nine people and displaced nearly 200,000, relief agency officials said on Wednesday.

Nine other people were missing, while two others have been injured, the National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC) said.

Three Philippine Airlines planes and two Cebu Pacific planes bound for Cagayan de Oro City were not able to leave the Ninoy Aquino International Airport Terminals 2 and 3 in Manila yesterday morning.

9 DEAD A9

STORMY More than 100 households are affected by a sudden storm surge that hit Limasawa, Lanao del Norte, on Tuesday night.

Baguio City temperatures plunge to 9.4 °C

UNUSUAL WEATHER HAS brought heavy rains in Visayas and Mindanao and sent the temperature dipping to an all-time low this year of 9.4 degrees Celsius in Baguio City.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) blamed the drenching in central and southern Philippines on the tail end of a cold front—

BAGUIO A9

WEATHER FORECAST

FORECAST: Eastern Luzon will experience mostly cloudy skies with scattered light rains while Metro Manila, Visayas and Mindanao will have mostly cloudy skies with scattered showers. The rest of Luzon will have partly cloudy skies with isolated rains.

Manila	Partly Cloudy	Antipolo	Cloudy with Rains
Baguio	Partly Cloudy	Batac	Cloudy with Rains
Tuguegarao	Partly Cloudy	Iba	Cloudy with Rains
Laoag	Partly Cloudy	Tacloban	Cloudy with Rains
Cabanatuan	Partly Cloudy	San Jose	Cloudy with Rains
Legazpi	Cloudy with Rains	Tuguegarao City	Cloudy with Rains
Dagupan	Partly Cloudy	Borongan	Cloudy with Rains

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4D 2 SUERTRES

1PM	1	9	1	2	2	8	8	0
4PM	2	4	7	4	5	5	0	1

6D 3 D

2PM	5	0	6	5PM	5	0	6	9PM	5	0	6

MEGALOTTO 6/45

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Palace: What P20-B pork?

By TJ Burgonio and DJC. Calauagan Jr.

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY EDUARDO ERMITA CAST doubt on the claim of two opposition senators that administration lawmakers have realigned some P20 billion in the P1.415-trillion 2009 national budget into the congressional pork barrel, possibly to build up the administration advantage in the 2010 elections.

Saying that budget allocations can be subject to many interpretations, Ermita said he believed the realignments that were made by the legislators were "shovehead."

"If you analyze the budget, you can ask a lot of questions as oftentimes, or the so-called pork barrel. But we can be very sure that these things are legal and shoveheard," he said, adding that he respected the opinion of the two senators who made the accusation.

Realigned cutbacks

Senators Panfilo Lacson, and Manuel Roxas II claimed that the House version of the budget had slashed some P58.376 billion from debt service, miscellaneous personnel funds and the Department of Agriculture budget.

The cutbacks were realigned to the regional infrastructure projects of the public works departments, additional spending money for local government units and additional pork barrel for Congress, they said.

"That's a normal mention especially from those not necessarily with the President. It's one thing to suppose what might happen. It's another to prove that it will happen," said Ermita.

"But I'm very sure that the President, having been a senator, knows that which is not proper, and what the rest resents," he said.

While the bicameral conference committee will not be convening until next week to reconcile the Senate and House versions of the budget, he said President Macapagal-Arroyo remained confident the budget would pass within the month.

"Our optimism is borne out by the fact that some noted senators even came up with a position on an aside politics and focus on the economy. And they know that the economy will be affected if the budget is not passed," Ermita said.

Even so, the President issued a memorandum to the Cabinet that the government would be operating on the reenacted 2008 budget upon the end of the month.

'Horse trading'

Meanwhile, Lacson said that the administration senators and congressmen who allegedly made the budget realignments are be expected to engage in brisk "horse trading" in the letters to keep their pork barrel funds and amendments in the final budget.

But he warned that the public and opposition lawmakers would demand more transparency in reconciling the Senate and House versions to ensure that the national priority of shielding the economy from a global depression would come first before the administration's political agenda in 2010.

"We have to be vigilant in the in-cam, I expect them to go into horse trading and decide on a trade-off not to touch each other's amendments," he said.

Co-chair of the committee, Sen. Edgardo Angara and Quirino Rep. Junie Cua have a lot of discretion to adopt the reforms of their houses, Lacson said.

"So long as the disagreeing provisions are reconciled, they can agree on anything, within and even beyond the new revenues. While both of them were given by the bicam members full authority to discuss and reconcile the provisions in the budget bill, they will have to present it before the body for deliberation and approval," he said.

Lacson said he doubted whether P20 billion from the budget allocations for debt servicing, agrarian reform and personnel expenses. The allocations were redirected to Congress, regional projects for the Department of Public Works and Highways and Department of Education, and local government units.

The pork barrel increases allegedly made by administration legislators are on top of the P200 million annual pork barrel allocations for senators and P70 million for House members.

House Speaker Prospero Nograles refused to comment on the alleged pork barrel insertions in the 2009 budget.

"Senator Angara and committee chair Junie Cua know what they are doing in both chambers," said Nograles in a text message.

GMA writes Bush: Thanks

PRESIDENT MACAPAGAL-ARROYO has written to outgoing American President Bush to thank him for the United States' support for the Philippines during his term, Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said yesterday.

"President Macapagal-Arroyo wrote a letter of acknowledgment and congratulations to President Bush for the most good relations between and two countries," Ermita said.

In her letter, Ms Arroyo mentioned US support for the Philippines' economy and security, he said.

The government expects the same kind of support from the US after President-elect Barack Obama takes his oath on Jan. 20, Ermita added.

"In fact there are expectations that the US government has been supportive of its allies, and the Philippines is considered one of the most important in Southeast Asia," Ermita told reporters in a briefing.

"We have had the Mutual Defense Treaty with them since 1951. The Seventh Fleet is ever here in the Pacific area. They continue their engagements with us through the Balikatan Exercises," he said.

"With all these developments, we are optimistic that our bilateral relations will improve to the mutual benefit of the both the US and Philippine governments," he said.

After his election victory over Republican John McCain, Mr Arroyo tried to call Obama to congratulate him but failed to reach him.

Obama returned her call after Ms Arroyo had returned home from the visit to the US, including Obama's hometown Chicago, in early November last year, reasserting her of continuing good relations and cooperation between the two countries. TJ Burgonio

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NBI ends probe of Valley golf brawl

By Jeannette I. Andrade and Edson Tandoc Jr.

THE NATIONAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION (NBI) has ended its investigation of the Valley Golf and Country Club brawl last year involving members of the Hagedorn and De la Paz clans, but has declined to disclose the results, saying that would have to wait until the bureau submits its report to the justice department.

The NBI had been tapped by Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez to investigate the "real story" behind the Valley Golf incident on Dec. 20, 2008 that resulted in charges and countercharges filed by the feuding families.

Apart from statements provided by Agusan del Sur, as well as those of businessman Dabbie de la Paz and his 14-year-old son Rico, the NBI had relied on testimonies of "independent" witnesses in sorting up with its findings, said NBI Director Nestor Mantaring.

Among the "independent" witnesses were six caddies and four other clubhouse employees.

The government official now later ordered suspended by the club while De la Paz was expelled as member and his children banned from Valley Pangasinanan's two sons were also banned for life.

Meanwhile, farmer-protesters camped outside the department of agrarian reform office in Quezon yesterday said the upholders security should also be removed from his post for allegedly usurping lands from the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP).

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A PORTRAIT of Maria Ejercito, mother former President Joseph Estrada, is placed next to her casket at the St. John the Baptist church in San Juan. She died on Tuesday at the age of 103. NOEL PABALATE

MARIA MARCELO-EJERCITO; 103

Erap grieves over ma's death

By Edson Tandoc Jr.

THE FAVORITE SON ALMOST DID NOT make it for on the first day of his mother's wake.

When former President Joseph "Erap" Estrada finally showed up at St. John the Baptist (Pinaglabanan) Church in San Juan City late night, he said he was not only sad he lost a "strong mother" but because Maria "Tinsa Mary" Marcelo-Ejercito did not live long enough to see her son "fully cleared."

"I had told her once: 'I hope you can still see the day when everything will be cleared.' But I am very sad that she was not able to wait for it," a grief-stricken Estrada said.

The former president had holed himself up in his room at his house on Polk Street in Greenhills, San Juan City shortly after learning his 103-year-old mother had died on Tuesday of complications arising from heart attack.

"It is difficult to lose a mother. She was the one who kept me strong especially after I left Malacañang," Estrada said, referring to his ouster from the presidency.

Flanked by relatives and friends, he smiled nearly "She always told me that as long as you are not doing anything wrong to your fellowmen, you should fight for what you started for," he told reporters.

Estrada said he would miss his mother's advice the most. "She gave me inspiration, courage and strength. She was always an up side. She was silent but compassionate," he said.

Turning into a fight mood, he recalled: "I think I was her favorite child because I was the one who would march more often when she got angry" he added.

The president said he was sorry he was not around when another former president, Corazon Aquino, came to offer her condolences, but thanked her just the same.

Aquino arrived earlier escorted by her son, Sen. Noynoy Aquino. Tinsa Mary's casket, which remained closed, was opened when Aquino dropped by.

Among the other prominent personalities at the wake yesterday were Sen. Miriam Defensor Santiago, former vice president Teofisto Guingona, former Sen. Ernesto Maceda, former executive secretary Joey Lina and Sen. Loren Legarda. Vice President Noli de Castro and El Shaddai leader Bro. Mike Velarde also turned up later.

Despite an appeal to visitors not to send flowers and instead direct their cash donations to Erdie Muey's favorite charities, the church was full of floral wreaths, including one that came with a card from Estrada's friend-turned-nemesis Luis "Chavit" Singson.

Only the name "Chavit" was written on a wide white ribbon spread across the wreath that was displayed in front of the church. Its short message read: "My sincere condolences."

Officials identified with the administration also sent flowers, including House Speaker Prospero Nograles and Cabinet members Lito Atienza, Gilbert Teodoro, Ronaldo Puno, Marianito Roque, Peter Favila and Angelo Reyes. "Everybody is welcome, especially our friends, but also even our enemies," said Estrada's son, San Juan Mayor JV Ejercito.

With Christine O. Avendaño

No demolitions yet, Boracay resorts assured

By Alexis Romero

THERE will be no outright demolition of private structures in the resort island of Boracay, Environment Secretary Lito Atienza assured property owners yesterday.

Atienza tried to allay fears over what will happen when the government starts implementing a Supreme Court decision that classified 628 parcels of Boracay land as alienable and disposable land and the remaining 40 percent as forest land.

In a statement yesterday, Atienza said he would extend full support to all Boracay stakeholders and urged them to form committees to work with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

In an Oct. 9 decision, the Supreme Court affirmed Presidential Proclamation 1064 classifying 80.94 percent of the 1,032 hectares of Boracay island, or 628.96 hectares, as alienable and disposable. This means the "owners" of this land can be issued titles.

Unfair

The high court, however, ruled that the remainder of the island should be preserved under state ownership as forest land.

The problem is that resorts have already been built in those areas.

Some of the Boracay resort owners said the high court decision was "unfair" and vowed to be aware their rights were violated once they claim as their property.

Following the Supreme Court decision, President Macapagal-Arroyo ordered Atienza to meet with the resort owners and assure them that the government would not take over their facilities.

"The directive of [the Pres. did] is clear. We don't want to demolish structures outright," Atienza said. He urged the stakeholders to immediately comply with the law while the DENR looks for ways to resolve the issue.

Atienza stressed that the government has the duty and responsibility to preserve the environment of the island "guided by the principle of sustainable development and strict observance of the law."

'In good faith'

In his meeting with Boracay stakeholders, Atienza said he clarified that the DENR would issue resort owners an "holdover in good faith".

"We are not here to push you against the wall without any option. We want to give you preferential right to the land you are occupying," he said.

"We are ready and willing to find a common ground so the investors that you will be able to continue staging [profits from] your investments so that Boracay can still remain a jewel [of] the country," he said.

He also warned investors against killing victim in unscrupulous real estate development that will entitled properties in what may be classified as protected areas.

Atienza said the government undertook the review of a survey of the island to determine the boundaries between alienable and disposable land and forest land.

Atienza: No signs of felled Subic trees

ENVIRONMENT SECRETARY Lito Atienza yesterday asked urban planner and architect Felino Palafox Jr. to "stick to the truth" after finding that no trees have been cut here to make way for the proposed Ocean V hotel-casino at the Subic Bay Freeport.

"Solitario for the moment must is good but, of course, we have to stick to reality and the truth," Atienza said in a press statement. He was referring to the claim of Palafox that the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority was planning to cut 2000 trees to give way to a P320-million project.

One of the environment groups who had expressed support for Palafox said his allegations will have to be answered following a visit to the project site.

"If the allegations of Palafox will have to be answered," stressed Fr. Jose Vic Emilaza, executive vice-secretary of the Association of Major Religious Superiors in the Philippines. "We hope we could run a dialogue between the two parties."

The site visit was organized by the AMRSP and was joined by some 180 representatives from the Haribon Foundation, Kapatirang Zambales Bantay Kalikasan, Forest Foundation Philippines, Bantay Kalikasan, Save Subic Movement, Subic Watch, Subic Bay Environmental Watch, Subic Bay Forest Watch, Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority, Subic Bay Freeport Zone Police, Subic Bay Freeport Fire Department, Subic Bay Freeport Customs, Subic Bay Freeport Immigration, Subic Bay Freeport Security Group, Subic Bay Freeport Tourism Department, Subic Bay Freeport Transportation Department, Subic Bay Freeport Human Resources Department, Subic Bay Freeport Environment Department, Subic Bay Freeport Planning Department, Subic Bay Freeport Engineering Department, Subic Bay Freeport Legal Department, Subic Bay Freeport Public Relations Department, Subic Bay Freeport Information Technology Department, Subic Bay Freeport Finance Department, Subic Bay Freeport Administration Department, Subic Bay Freeport Operations Department, Subic Bay Freeport Marketing

SUPERMALLS

In 2009, SM Supermalls will continue to serve the needs of its millions of customers who have been part of its growth over the years.

SM has been enacting various projects in all its malls to benefit its customers. Through the SM CARES program, it aims not only to practice sensitivity to the needs of our developing country, but also to serve as an example that business profitability and corporate social responsibility can co-exist.

This has been the vision of Hans T. Sy, President of SM Prime Holdings, Inc. and carried out by the Shopping Center Management Corporation (SCMC) through its President Annie S. Garcia. Through this vision, SM Supermalls, the leader in Philippine Retail, is committed to lead in the area of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

REDUCE, RE-USE, RECYCLE

The Recycling Market, aptly named Trash To Cash, happens every first Friday and Saturday of the month at SM Supermalls. This project has saved 6,000 seven year-old trees so far, also two tons of mall-generated garbage are diverted from landfills every week.

BREASTFEEDING STATION

In the Philippines, SM is the first to provide private areas for women to nurse their babies in all its malls. Mothers may now enjoy the convenience of a room with a sofa, lavatory and diaper changer making it easy for them to nurse their babies in private and for free.

CHILD-FRIENDLY STAFF & FACILITIES

SM's Children's Committee has made strides to tend to children's needs. Diaper-changing counters are available for use in SM Supermalls. Handicapped children are even afforded business classes should they require assistance in using the cordless rooms. Toddlers can use kiddie carts to make strolling more enjoyable. And the mall offers various specialized children's shops and services like kid's salons, infant boutiques, and children's bookstore libraries to keep the kids entertained and educated.

WATER CONSERVATION

SM supports DENR's Clean Water Act 0275 by installing waterless urinals in all its malls. Recycling water via rooftop rainwater plants and sprayers installed in the faucets ensures savings of 30-40% of mall water consumption.

ENABLING THE DISABLED

Serving people with disabilities, takes the participation of SM Malls in the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons from compliance to empowerment. New hires in management and staff get training on be able to anticipate the needs of disabled mall goers, audits are performed and rates measure the elevated pedestrian lanes are implemented to ensure accessibility.

CARING FOR WOMEN

The SM Women's Committee aims to organize programs which focus on all kinds of women (working women, mothers, teenage girls, women abroad, single women, etc.). The main theme of the committee is to recognize women's achievements and to highlight women's activities in relation to SM Supermalls. One of the activities that the committee has organized in 2008 includes the Pink Friendship at Breast Cancer Trust (Makati) Hospital in celebration of the International Women's Day, Philippines.

ECOWATCH: EXCELLENCE IN ECOLOGY AND ECONOMY

Also under SM Cares is "Sustaining the Future". This project is focused on waste management, water conservation, air quality, and energy efficiency in particular to the points of focus are: multi-chambered receptacles for garbage to segregate disposal at the source; a new system for waterless male urinals; additional bicycle racks to encourage alternate means of transportation; and building management systems that control electric consumption, saving four million Kilowatt hours per month. As a result of these, SM Prime Holdings and its subsidiaries were awarded the 8th Annual EcoWatcher in Ecology and Economy) in the Large Scale Industry Category.

GREEN RETAIL AGENDA

Lastly, SM Cares also rolled out the Green Retail Agenda, a one-day conference providing "a fresh view of how Green Design translates into business sustainability and growth" in mind. The conference keynote speaker was Dr. Hunter Avens, World Fellow of Yale University in 2004 for his education and environment advocacies.

SM's projects in changing Filipinos' behavior for the better will be considered a complete success when these projects become part of daily life. Already, the balance sheets are showing that conservation projects and waste reduction is enhancing profitability. Once businesses big and small follow SM's lead, it won't be hard to strike the balance between opportunity and responsibility.

SM CARES
LET'S DO OUR SHARE

Palace: No sacred cows in drugs war

By TJ Burgonio and Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.

PRESIDENT MACAPAGAL-ARROYO, the country's new drug czar, has ordered ambassadors-authorities to crack down on big drug traffickers, including her supporters. Malacañang officials said yesterday.

"There will be no sacred cows," Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said when asked if Ms Arroyo would turn in her own political allies suspected of trafficking.

Ermita said the drive would go all the way "Anyone who will be involved, whoever they may be, they will have to account before the law."

Ms Arroyo on Tuesday declared that she would oversee the smoking-out campaign and latter as wrinkling over amid the bribery scandal besetting the Department of Justice (DOJ) is resolved.

DOJ prosecutors have been accused of dismissing charges against three drug suspects known as the dinkuang boys after they allegedly received P50 million. The prosecutors, who have denied the allegations, are on leave and are under investigation.

Ermita said operations drug rings on the order of heads of the dangerous Drugs Board and the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) would be targeted to the all-out war against trafficking.

Get big-name traffickers

Ms Arroyo expected the "big-name traffickers" to be immediately identified in the break campaign, and "brought before the bar of justice," he said.

Cebu Rep. Antonio Cuenco noted that only six of the 32 big drug syndicates identified by the PDEA had been dismantled as of last year.

Cuenco urged the President to bring down during her state as the sending over the 26 big syndicates on the PDEA list.

"They have been identified but how come they have not been hunted up to now?" asked Cuenco, vice chair of the Finance committee on dangerous drugs.

He also urged Ms Arroyo to beef up its prosecution of drug cases in view of its poor batting average in convicting drug traffickers and pushers over the past 10 years.

On Tuesday, Ms Arroyo also ordered the implementation of a raft of measures, including random drug tests on high school and college students, to curb drug abuse and trafficking across the country.

"Definitely that [major violators] is the target of our drug enforcement agencies, and with the President at the helm of this drive, you can be sure that we better have some situation," Ermita told reporters.

"Otherwise this problem will linger on, and it's to the detriment of society," he said.

Semblance of permanence

An unwritten watchdog said Ms Arroyo must give her new role a "semblance of permanence" to efficiently get to the bottom of the illegal drug problem in the country.

"The case of the Alabang Boys must not be the basis of the President's favorable to measuring the goal. It is just on the tip of the iceberg, so she must hold on to her new role for a longer period of time," said Dante Jimenez, chair of the Volunteers against Crime and Corruption (VACC).

The VACC is set to pitch this idea to Malacañang in a position paper today. The decision to submit a recommendation to Ms Arroyo was arrived at a board meeting yesterday.

ERMITA

The group expects its position to be opposed by various groups and personalities as the elections are just around the corner. "So we all know, illegal drugs are among the huge sources of election money," Jimenez said.

He noted that 80 percent of the heinous crimes in the country were drug-related.

Unimpressed

Others are not impressed by the President running himself anything else.

"It's bad if she will be unable to curb the problem of illegal drugs in the country. She might even be tagged as a recipient of bribes," Iloilo Minority Leader Augustine Frasco (Lp) said.

Frasco said Ms Arroyo should instead give the job to PDEA Director General Dionisio Santiago.

"Santiago has a good reputation and only needs a no-nonsense handling by the President. I think he will be able to do a good job," he said.

His wonder woman

By naming herself as anti-drug czar, the President has turned into "superwoman," said opposition Sen. Panfilo "Ping" Lacson.

"That is not good for somebody who is supposed to run the government. She's no wonder woman who could do everything," the senator said in Tacloban City on his way to various towns in Samar and Leyte.

Lacson's anti-slanting moves in the past did not lead to results. "There is no such thing as a drug czar in our administrative code. That is only a title and not a position," he said.

He said that every time the country faced a big problem, the President would name a czar. Ms Arroyo earlier named Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap as czar-at-large in charge of the rice crisis and Energy Secretary Angelo Reyes as energy czar when the country was suffering from high fuel prices.

Lacson also warned of more delays in **the investigation of the Alabang Boys' case.** "Most agencies in government won't move without her imprimatur," he said.

Only 24 convictions

In the House of Representatives, floor leader Speaker Arroyo, chair of the committee on dangerous drugs, pointed out that the government had only made 24 convictions out of the thousands of drug cases filed in the last 10 years.

In his report to the President, Dangerous Drugs Board Chair Vicente "Tito" Sotto III blamed the crumbling state's abysmal performance on the "unsupportiveness of prosecution witnesses, intimidation of witnesses, irregularity in the quality of evidence, irregularity in the quality of arrest, search and seizure, and inconsistencies in testimony."

Jefferson Soriano Aldon, commander of the Anti-Illegal Drugs Special Operations Task Force, wrote the House committee about the "seeming unabated dismissal of illegal drug cases especially those of high-valued targets and high-profile personalities even in the prosecution level."

Legislative reforms

Representative Aldon said the committee would come up with legislative reforms aimed at strengthening the role of the drug czar and ensuring the prosecution and enforcement side of the campaign.

The committee members suggested bigger budget allocations for the PDEA and police agents, setting up of an independent prosecution unit for drug cases, and using latest technology such as surveillance cameras and wiretapping as effective drug pushers and traffickers caught in the drug busts.

The committee would also consider the President's proposal to conduct random drug tests in schools.

Gwen Rep. Elpidio Barzaga suggested that Congress members undergo the same tests to set an example among public officials.

"How can we have an effective investigation of drug cases and legislate laws meant to address the drug menace if the public will perceive some of us as drug users?" asked Barzaga.

Aldon and Cuenco shot down the proposal. **INSIDE** report, Pictures Chronicler 10 Comedians and Acolytes (L-R): Dy in Montiz, and Jose Imbiada, Inquirer Visayas

Ombudsman: 10 prosecutors involved in case-fixing

From page A1

or after," she said in the Newsmakers Breakfast Forum.

Identify prosecutors

Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez challenged Gutierrez to identify the state prosecutors who are being investigated for alleged case-fixing.

"She should identify the people ... I have not seen any force have become nobody can fix me," he said.

There are about 2,000 prosecutors all over the country, still 600 short of what the DOJ needs, according to Gonzalez.

"As a matter of courtesy she should tell us," Gonzalez insisted.

Two sitting justice officials and three prosecutors were on Monday facing allegations that they accepted P50 million in exchange for the dropping of the drug charges against three Alabang boys—Richard Brodett, Joseph Torres and Jorge Joseph.

The instructions came from officials of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency, who also claimed that a relative of one of the so-called Alabang Boys dangled bribe offers ranging from P3 million to P25 million for the release of the three suspects.

Not limited to drug case

Gutierrez said the prosecutors involved in the reported case-fixing were not limited to drug cases.

Reacting in a statement that the DOJ was a "department store of justice where one can shop if one has money," Gutierrez said: "I think that's unfair to the officials in the DOJ. There are many prosecutors who can be trusted."

Gutierrez had been with the justice department for 21 years.

GONZALEZ

On Monday, the Ombudsman called on "officials-Mercado" to see her and help her stamp out reported corruption in the DOJ.

"Concerned valid organizations has called and launched an investigation of the alleged bribery of some prosecutors in exchange for the release of the Alabang Boys arrested in September last year for selling drugs.

She said the probe would be broadened to include other reports of supposed corruption in the department.

GUTIERREZ

Her message to what is likewise: "Use me in my office. We will treat with confidentiality the information that you will provide."

"We have to investigate this selling of cases and, of course, we need our what-is-likewise. We need evidence. We need to do this problem so we can change the perception," Gutierrez said.

"I've find that they committed violations, then by all means we will file cases against them," she said.

Private lawyers, too

Gutierrez said her office would also investigate private lawyers.

"I heard there are also private lawyers frequenting the DOJ, stalking the prosecutors. What more than mere? You can tell me, why do private lawyers frequent the DOJ?" Gutierrez said.

"I will not name who these private lawyers are," Gutierrez said. "I will be getting information from some of the prosecutors themselves who were with me when I was at the DOJ."

She said these private lawyers would be liable for violations of legal ethics and, depending on the investigation, "we will recommend what measures can be taken and that can be submitted to the Integrated Bar of the Philippines for proper actions."

Gutierrez spoke to reporters after attending the launch of an anticorruption training at the University of the Philippines. The training is be officials at the Office of the Ombudsman and the Bureau of Internal Revenue.

The training is sponsored by the US Agency for International Development and Millennium Challenge Corp.

Gonzalez: Marcelino's acts not authorized, unconstitutional

From page A1

the post by Malacañang when the PDEA was beginning to build an organic staff and the force an agency of borrowed personnel.

Marcelino said he was only following orders when assigned to the agency in 2007.

"Matters pag ge where are ang order," Marcelino told the inquest panelists.

The soldier, who had seen action in Mindanao, said he got the assignment on the request of the PDEA and that his detail went through the hierarchy of approving officers. The Armed Forces of the Philippines Headquarters, the Department of National Defense, and finally Malacañang.

"It's not up to us where we will be assigned. We can't choose where we will be assigned," he said.

Besides heading the agency's Special Enforcement Service, Marcelino is also chief of the International Cooperation and Foreign Affairs Service and the Investigative Counter-intelligence Operations Service.

Two other military officers, both Marcelino's "friends" (classmates) in the Philippine Military Academy's Bantay Laya class of 1994, hold key positions at the PDEA.—one is acting director of PDEA's Plans and Operations Service and the other, an army major, handles intelligence.

The soldiers also handle training of recruited agents.

Teodoro brought up question

Gonzalez said Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro brought up the question over Marcelino's authority to work in the PDEA at the Cabinet meeting Tuesday in which the controversy was discussed.

"Secretary Teodoro mentioned that he (Marcelino) is an active military officer (and) he is covered by the Constitution. But it is specific provision of the law that if you would endorse that, all his acts are illegal. Unconstitutional and illegal," Gonzalez said.

It was the PDEA Special Enforcement Service headed by Marcelino that arrested Richard Brodett, Jr., Jorge Joseph and Joseph Torres—the so-called Alabang Boys—in a buy-bust operation in September last year.

Marcelino disclosed that he was offered bribes ranging from P3 million to P20 million by the release of the suspects. He said he reported the offers.

Independent probe

The PDEA also claimed that a P25-million bribe lost to that dismissal of the drug possession charges against the suspects, prompting a need not between the PDEA and the Department of Justice (DOJ).

CONFRONTATION AT THE HOUSE Maj. Ferdinand Marcelino goes but under the collar as he replies to the unmoderate hostile comments from Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez during the House hearing on dangerous drugs regarding the case of the so-called Alabang Boys. RICHARD ESPIRITU

Even as the prosecutors vehemently denied the allegations, President Macapagal-Arroyo ordered five justice officials and prosecutors to go on leave pending an "independent" investigation.

"I never raised this to the President because if it came from me it would be colored. It came about in the course of the (Cabinet) discussion. It was Secretary Teodoro who mentioned," Gonzalez said.

Asked if the arrest of the Alabang Boys could be considered null because Marcelino was the lead agent, Gonzalez said the matter could be questioned in court by the suspects.

"That's now the subject of investigation and it has been raised before the Court of Appeals," he said.

"I'm just saying that under the Constitution, he's disqualified (from working in PDEA) because he's an active duty (military) official," Gonzalez added.

Resign

"If he wants to stay in the PDEA, he should resign from the Armed Forces," Gonzalez said.

"All the operations handled by Major Marcelino (in PDEA) could be considered invalid, unconstitutional unless you can consider that as a de facto act," the Justice secretary said.

"I don't think the President can refuse to accept that because that is the Constitution," Gonzalez added.

Told that active duty military officers were serving in other government offices, Gonzalez said that was the business of the heads of the government agencies involved.

Gonzalez said PDEA Director General Dionisio Santiago, a former military chief of staff, could order the retirement of anyone except an active duty military officer.

"We can order under him (called conservative party founder) Jose Mari Chan," Gonzalez quipped.

He said that as the Cabinet meeting, he confronted Santiago for failing to submit some his claim that a P30-million bribery took place after the arrest of the Alabang Boys.

Charges of bribery have become a major point of debate after Santiago himself admitted at a hearing in the House of Representatives last week that the PDEA floated the P30-million alleged bribe to the media as part of its "psy-war" tactics against the DOJ prosecutors.

Study procedures

"That's why they have to be properly educated on all procedures required under the (Anti-Illegal Drugs) law," the justice secretary said.

Right in the inquest, State Prosecutor Aristo Reyes is already dismissed the drug possession charges against the three suspects—due to lapses in the PDEA's arrest procedure.

Recital clearance's name

The dismissal of the charges was upheld upon review by two more senior prosecutors and ultimately by Chief State Prosecutor Jovencito Zuño, who has strongly denied any wrongdoing in the process.

In the House of Representatives, the committee on dangerous drugs is urging Marcelino to expose to public his claim who offered him "lasting consuh (three chickens)" or P3 million to drop the charges against the Alabang Boys.

"He (Marcelino) has to eventually grapple with his gut as regards the truthfulness of his who made the proposal. This is the gap in his otherwise brilliant testimony. His convictand refusal will catch his credibility," Pantaleon Rep. Italo Cobo said at yesterday's committee meeting.

Cobo's proposal for Marcelino to reveal his mindset's identity to the Office of the Ombudsman was adopted by the committee.

Cobo said that it would be better that the Ombudsman take over the bribery probe because Marcelino might have committed perjury along with the National Bureau of Investigation, which is under the DOJ.

Marcelino revealed to Cobo and other committee members the identity of his classmate in PMA Class of 1994 during an executive session last week.

Deputy Speaker for Mindanao Philip Kimpo, vice chair of the DOJ's Task Force on Anti-Illegal Drugs, accused Marcelino of "covering up" for his friend, saying his refusal to name him was "suspicious." With a report from Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.

4 Koreans to be kicked out of RP

By Jamaine Reding

THE BUREAU OF IMMIGRATION (BI) HEADQUARTERS said it has decided to deport three South Koreans wanted for serious crimes in their country.

The Koreans' board, chaired by Immigration commissioner Marcelino Libanan, issued the deportation orders against the Koreans following formal proceedings held at the courtroom of the agency's office in Intramuros, Manila.

To be expelled from the country are Kim Jeong Seok and Eun Jung Ok, who are both wanted for kidnapping in Incheon and Choi Byung Ryu, wanted in Seoul for swindling.

The fourth Korean ordered to be deported is Hwang Kwuan, Jun Hyung Woo, who is the subject of a complaint for fraud in the Philippines.

Libanan said the Koreans, who are detained at the bureau's jail in Taguig City, will be deported as soon as the necessary clearances for their deportations are secured from the courts and the National Bureau of Investigation.

They were also ordered to be blacklisted from entering the Philippines for being undesirable aliens, Libanan added.

Immigration associate commissioners Roy Alvarez and Rodrigo Gulang Jr. also signed the deportation orders.

"Let this also serve as another warning to foreign fugitives that they should not use the Philippines as a sanctuary in order to evade prosecution and punishment for crimes they committed in their homelands," Libanan said in a statement.

The bureau's records showed that Kim and four others arrested on Dec. 27 by immigration and police agents at the parking area of the Ninoy Aquino International Airport.

The four Koreans, according to Libanan, said Kim and four are subjects of arrest warrants issued by the Seoul Central District Court for the crime of kidnapping.

The Koreans were said to be undocumented aliens as they could not present their passports or any travel documents subsequently by the arresting agents.

Choi and Ahn were arrested on Dec. 3 at the Food Terminal Inc. complex in Taguig based on the complaints of a Korean couple in Parañaque City who claimed they were defrauded by the suspects of P7 million.

The suspects enticed the couple to invest in the grocery business but the duo failed to return the couple's money despite repeated demands.

Additionally, the Korean Embassy said Choi is also wanted to stand trial before a district court in Seoul for involvement in an embezzlement case involving $68 million (about P3-billion).

Both Choi and Ahn have been illegally working in the Philippines as they were caught in the act of supervising employees of a transport company when they were arrested, according to the BI.

Sino firm not qualified for NorthRail, says expert

By Miko Morales

HONG KONG) A construction firm with no known experience in a railway system) be awarded the $500-million NorthRail project?

No, engineering consultant ... questioned the capability of a Chinese engineering to build the train system in his testimony at a Makati court hearing the petition to nullify the contract on the NorthRail project filed by lawyer Harry Roque.

Bong Santiago, a civil engineer sought by the University of the Philippines Law Center to evaluate the contract, told the court that the contractor for the project, China National Machinery Equipment Corp. (CNMEC), "does not have the capacity to build" railway projects.

Upon cheating with the company's website, Santiago said CNMEC did not have railway projects similar to the Northrail project. The witness said that the government "acquiesce" nonqualifications by a contractor to have a lower "(it) years" of experience in construction.

"CNMEC isn't even on the top-ten railway contractors of China," he said. "Truth-ing in their records show they have built Ltd similar project," Santiago said.

Called to the podium as an expert witness, Santiago said he took part in the 10 Law Center's review of the NorthRail contract between CNMEC and the government in 2004.

Santiago also cited some parts to the contract that he found "strange," like the condition that "Chinese standards" must be used in the construction of the railway system. He said that in practice, Philippine standards are observed in infrastructure projects built in the country.

The contract stipulates that the project was to be insured by a Chinese firm, according to Santiago which, he pointed out, ran against a government policy. He said that infrastructure projects are insured by the GSIS.

THE DAILY GOSPEL

Thursday, January 15, 2009
1st Week in Ordinary Time
1st Reading: Heb 5:1-10
Gospel: Mk 2:18-22

A leper came to Jesus and begged him, "If you so will, you can make me clean." Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." The leprosy left the man at once and he was made clean. At once Jesus sent the man away, solemnly warned him, "Don't tell anyone about this, but go and show yourself to the priest and for the cleansing bring the offering ordered by Moses; in this way you will make your declaration."

However, as soon as the man went out, he began spreading the news everywhere, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter any town. He was even enough for anyone to find him; people came to him from everywhere.

Commentary

It is fair to say that God was obsessed with sin. That was probably because, in his early OK, he encountered so many sins against his holiness. Still, there is much truth in what he has to say about the self-destructive nature of sin in our lives. When sin is long permitted in, it destroys the person, for whom there is no turning to the right or left. If we allow ourselves to sin, we trust God's power to forgive our sins, we may not detect him.

Our tomorrow may not be ours, we must make the best out of each and every day. There are many of us, not even the strongest of us, who do not need the help of other Christians. And there were of us, at one and despised, who do not need us to care for their standing in faith and of their saints. He appears first, but it only. A spiritual pleasure, it is destructive. A promise made, but performs nothing. The description of sin hardens the soul; sins are many way for another; and every difference act of sin confirms the sinful habit. So, let us pledge today to beware of letting sin into our lives.

Christian Communications Foundation, Inc. 4 Edsa cor. St. 1919 Bldg., Diliman, Quezon City, 1101 Metro Manila, Philippines. Tel. No. 920-11-11 Fax No. 920-11-12 E-mail: ccf@ccf.org.ph Website: http://www.ccf.org.ph/ Philippine Catholic Mission Service in the Philippines. Philippine Catholic Mission Service in the Philippines. Philippine Catholic Mission Service in the Philippines.

Leviste found guilty of homicide

Fromage Al

Mayor Jejomar Binay three hours later and was subsequently brought to a hospital purportedly for treatment of a heart ailment.

Alameda said evidence pointed to the "deliberateness" of the accused in killing the victim and not just defend himself.

"Had the accused merely defended himself as he claimed from the alleged unlawful aggression of the victim, one shot would have been sufficient or enough to immobilize the victim. There was no longer any reason for the accused to shoot him four times even aiming at the head, a vital organ," the judge said in a 36-page decision.

Leviste was charged with murder but the court said the prosecution had failed to prove that there was treachery, premeditation and cruelty.

'God is truly good'

"We're satisfied," said the victim's wife Thelma.

"We have learned that justice is not only for the rich, but also for the poor. God is truly good," she said. "We have forgiven him a long time ago. They had been together a long time."

Said Dr. Ian Abel daughter Divina Sanchez: "I know how they feel so I have mixed feelings. You cannot be totally happy."

Alameda, however, in the end of yesterday's sentencing, Leviste projected an unaffected look. He laughed while shaking hands with his lawyers when he entered the courtroom before 9 a.m. and smiled as he was being whisked off to jail, where he will spend his 6th birthday tomorrow.

"The court has judged it the way it sees it. But my conscience is clear and I am innocent. It has not yet, therefore, to file an appeal and get complete vindication for the sake of my family," he said in a statement. "I leave my fate to God."

Aside from asking Leviste to pay P300,000 in civil and moral damages, the judge canceled his bail and ordered him escorted to the Makati City Jail.

The defense pleaded for the court to extend his bail for "humanitarian reasons" but Alameda insisted that it was now up to the Court of Appeals.

"We will oppose motions for bail because he is now a flight risk. If the defense asks for bail, then we will also come with the CA that it's murder," Senior State Prosecutor Thomas Consulta said.

In his decision, Alameda said that a longtime licensed gun owner like De los Alas knew how to handle the weapon and should have removed its safety lever if he intended to fire it.

"If indeed the victim was bent on engaging the accused in a fistfight, then it would have been more logical and believable that the victim removed the safety lever and cocked it ready to be used, before entering the accused's office," the decision said.

The defense, added Alameda, was unable to show that the victim actually fired his gun as there were no spent shells from his pistol recovered from the crime scene, one did he test positive for gunpowder.

There was also no evidence that De los Alas was inebriated at the time, as claimed by the defense.

In pushing the murder charge, the court said the prosecution never presented any eyewitness to the killing.

Shot at close range

The close-range shots inflicted from about a meter away also did not establish treachery by itself as this "cannot be inferred but must be proved as fully and convincingly as the crime itself."

Jonathan Jimenez for father decided to go shopping with her that day due to a spat with Leviste over a P1-million commission for real-estate sales, but that De los Alas asserted at the last minute when his boss summoned him.

Crosby was not present by the prosecution as well when it failed to show that Leviste packaged his victim's agency by shooting him successively.

Still, the Department of Justice notes the they had done their best in prosecuting their case against the former government official.

"We're glad he was convicted even only the homicide, and we appreciate that the judge did not believe that the accused acted in self-defense," Sebastian said.

Leviste's apprehensive daughter Toni expressed sadness at the conviction but said the family would exhaust legal remedies at the Court of Appeals "because that justice will be served in the end."

'Everybody has a cross'

"Today my dad wasn't able to close his arms. It's been very hard for our family and it continues to be. But everybody has a cross to bear, and this is ours, but we remain strong in our faith," Toni said.

After the verdict was read, Toni and Leviste brothers, Binangan Vice Gov. Mark Leviste, shook hands with the De los Alas kin to "extend their sympathies."

"We were both looking for justice. Probably they got what they wanted. We are sad but are very humbled by this experience," the younger Leviste said.

Leviste lawyer Harvey Cupeda said he was not yet eyeing parole since it would mean that the accused would languish for at least two years behind bars.

"We're not after parole because that means we're abandoning our appeal. We're working on filing an appeal at the CA as they could reverse the decision of the lower court," he said.

Atty. Loren Legarda only has a short and simple message for Leviste, his former husband. "It is just right that justice should prevail, whether the people involved are rich or poor. Let justice be served." With a report from Edson Tendero

GMA appoints . . .

Fromage Al

ON HIS OWN MERITS Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez hails the appointment to the high court of former Sandiganbayan Associate Justice Cleotilde Nuñez-Bautista, saying her has enough merits to defend her before in Peralta's famous tug-of-war President Arroyo. (STORY ON PAGE A9)

Dumlao, 56, will replace Associate Justice Ruben Reyes who reached the mandatory retirement age of 70 on Jan. 3.

Malacañang immediately sought to quash suspicions that the appointment might be connected to the supposed plans to unseat Ms. Arroyo's term by seeking the 1987 Constitution.

"Every time there's an appointment, now like this comes out ... then the next question will be about Charter change), that she was to stay on as president," Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita told reporters in Filipino.

Like a compass

"It's like a compass. (The) appointment is the magnetic north of her development," he said.

Cotina have requested him that a high court dominated by Ms Arroyo's appointees might force petitions on Charter change.

Ms Arroyo's allies in the House of Representatives had earlier announced that they would ask the Supreme Court to resolve the question on whether both chambers of Congress should vote jointly or separately once reviewed in a constituent assembly.

Joint voting could purportedly give the Arroyo allies the change since House members could easily overwhelm senators—who are said to be generally against the idea—considering that by the three have of their number.

Ermita said an inventory of recent Supreme Court decisions would show that Ms Arroyo's appointees did not necessarily favor cases involving the administration.

In 2006, Justice Antonio Carpio, an Arroyo appointee, penned a strongly worded decision against the effort of the Sigaw ng Bayan to revive the Constitution through people's initiative.

The decision by the court derailed the effort as a "grand deception" and a "giant fraud."

GMA father's namesake

Ermita joked that Peralta did not get the appointment because he was the namesake of Ms Arroyo's late father, former President Diosdado Macapagal.

"The President makes a decision based on what the result about the qualifications of these people and also on what she knows about them," he said. "She also asks around about the capability of her appointees."

Peralta, an alumnus and former professor of the University of Santo Tomas law school, used to belong to the so-called "Guillotine Club," a group of judges known for imposing the capital punishment.

As a Regional Trial Court judge, he sentenced to death more than 40 people.

Peralta is also known as the "plunder judge" for being the first to hand down a conviction for plunder since it became a heinous crime in 1991.

In 2003, Peralta, then a judge at the Quezon City Regional Trial Court, sentenced Dominga Mamili, a cashier at the Bureau of Internal Revenue, to 100 life terms for diverting more than P200 million to withholding tax payments into her bank accounts from 1998 to 1997. She later withdrew the money.

On Sept. 12, 2007, Peralta, along with then Sandiganbayan Presiding Justice Teresita Leonardo-De Castro and fellow Associate Justice Francisco Villaruz Jr., sentenced Estrada to up to 40 years in prison. Ms Arroyo pardoned Estrada the following month.

Ms Arroyo appointed Peralta to the Sandiganbayan in July 2001, then promoted him as presiding justice in March 2008, following her appointments to the Court of Appeals as associate justice of the Supreme Court.

Born on March 20, 1952, Peralta is a native of Lucena, Quezon Province. He has a law degree from University of Santo Tomas. He is married to Court of Appeals Associate Justice Fernanda Lampas Peralta, with whom he has four children—Rosselig (who also Christopher and Timothy John, and John Isaac.

Good track record

In a text message, Sen. Francis Pangilinan said:

"We trust that Justice Peralta is fully aware that his appointment comes at a time when there is serious concern about restoring the independence of the judiciary given that some justices are operating in the coming months.

"We hope he would be able to use to the occasion to prosecute the Supreme Court's independence as the central justice in the nation."

Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez, who sits in the Judicial and Bar Council that submits a short list of Supreme Court nominees to the President, said Peralta was "very well qualified" to sit in the high court.

"He has a good track record in the judiciary," Gonzalez said. With reports from Christine O. Avendaño, Dona Z. Pazzibugan, Cyril Bonabokry, Inquirer Research

Leviste: The 'promise' that never came to be

Fromage Al

province at the onset of martial law in 1972 when he was elected governor.

"Levies, in his youth, was a glimmer of hope from partisan Batangas politics. He was a new face different from the Laurels who controlled Batangas before," said Sen. Aquino, a fellow right lawyer who joined the opposition to oust the fascist Marcos dictatorship.

The hometown of the Lucenis—including the late Vice President Salvador "Doy" Laurel—is Tanauan, while the Levistes hail from Lipa.

Fresh wind

"Ever comes Tony, coming out as a possible replacement of the Laurel dynasty in Batangas. That was in the olden days. In other words, he gave out a lot of promise when he ran for governor, so I noticed him. He was a fresh wind," Pimentel said.

He did not come out openly against the Marcos dictatorship of politics in the country. In his way event, I noticed him because he was not a Laurel," he added.

"I thought that this young man at the time had a lot of promise of new leadership and politics in Batangas," Pimentel said.

"He became window sans Pinto also, it looks out of character. I don't know him that well, but it's not of character for him to pull a gun and kill."

Business and politics

Leviste, who celebrates his 60th birthday tomorrow, comes from a wealthy Batangas family renowned in business and politics.

"I didn't have to work a day of my life," he once told the business. He, nonetheless, proved to be bright, enterprising and outstanding while he was young.

At the age of 8, he already earned his first draw prizes by selling items on sidelines of Cagsiti Marvel and Superman to his classmates.

When he was 18, together with his twin Conrad, he took over the real estate empire of their father, Lamen, which had for a long time specialized in Makati properties.

In 1982, at age 22, Leviste was awarded Student of the Year by the Business Writers Association of the Philippines—one of the many awards he would receive.

Ten years later, he became the youngest governor of Batangas and was honored with a "Ten Outstanding Young Men of the Philippines" (TOYM) Award for Public Administration just after a year in office. He was governor until 1980.

Honorary Palestinian consul

Since then, he has served as governor of the board of investments and director in various government agencies such as Petroleum, Telecom and Housing Corp. and Philippine Tourism Authority.

He converted to Islam in 1986 and became honorary consul general of the State of Palestine.

Leviste was also a director of the Philippine Ports Authority and Philippine Aerospace Development Corp.

President Macapagal-Arroyo appointed him as chair of the Philippine Leisure and Retirement Authority in 2003.

Leviste married Sen. Loren Legarda in 1987. They have two sons. Legarda has publicly announced that she and Leviste had been leading separate lives since 2005.

He once hosted (but before Loren Legarda, then was Tony Leviste).

Leviste and his family, Celia Lamangan, separated after Lamangan left for the United States with their daughters when martial law was declared in 1972. With Inquirer Research

In Year of the Ox, 2 seers still bullish on RP amid gloom

Fromage Al

good year especially when it comes to money, Feng shui master Joseph Chan said yesterday.

Easy come, easy go

In another letter, author analysts Asteroid Cesalio said "political spending" could significantly prop up the local economy this year, while the telecommunications sector said certain blue chip companies would still prosper despite the uncertainty involved.

In a presentation at the Manila Oriental in Makati City, Chan noted that the Philippines, being a tropical country, has plentiful to the forth. Or, could look forward to a year of "harvesting, enjoying and good vibes."

"This year is 5-5-0-0-3 for the Philippines ... There will be no problem in earning money this year," Chan said, noting that the country, like the rest of Southeast Asia, is in a lucky position according to feng shui charts.

"But like what they say about money—easy come, easy go. The problem is (how) to conserve money."

Under the Chinese lunar calendar, the Ox rakes over and brings the Year of the Rat to a close on Jan. 25.

Chan said the Philippines may even turn out to be luckier than other Southeast Asian nations because Malacañang itself is in an auspicious location on the feng shui magic square.

Fortune favors parents

"The Philippine government should do something to attract more investments, so that the country will bloom. As I mention every year, tourism is one of the big sources of money for the country and this country has a lot of natural resources that can be developed," he said.

Noting that Filipinos also favors parents in 2009, President Macapagal-Arroyo, "because she is a mother, can bring in more business for the Philippines this year," Chan said.

And like others born in the Year of the Pig, Ms Arroyo can expect a very busy year marked by change and movement, he said.

Asteroid Cesalio said, however, that Asian nations sensing that the economy can be considered lucky this year. These are banking, automotive, entertainment, hotels, trading, transportation, logistics, spas, restaurants, call centers, electronics and petroleum exploration.

Earth and wood

Industries of the earth and wood elements, like construction, real estate, garments, textiles, agriculture and education, may not be as fong shui generated but would still manage to post some growth in the coming year, Chan said.

Speaking at the weekly International Forum at the Shangri-La Hotel, Ermita Plaza, Ortigas Center, Del Castillo said gains could be posted by the infrastructure and business process outsourcing (BPO) sectors.

"We expect a continued slowdown. But at the moment, we've managed to move forward, which shows investor confidence," he said.

Del Castillo said political spending related to the 2010 national elections and the implementation of fiscal reforms would help the economy bounce back by mid-2009 or early 2010.

Asked what stocks would be "good buys" this year, Castillo said: "Across the board, all are attractive enough. But the telcos and the blue chip companies are recommended."

He cited the Pangilinan companies as also good bets, while Asteroid Cesalio advised the Bank of the Philippine Islands as among the stocks to watch.

Of luck and lovers

On a personal level, Chan had some words of caution for persons aged 18 to 40 years old. People in this age bracket may not be so lucky this year because of the presence of the "Conflict star," which portends the spread of gossip, envy, rivalries and fighting.

"They should be more humble and cautious to avoid fighting or conflict. They should be more open to communication to avoid any misunderstandings. They should exercise self-control and discipline and try to avoid drinking too much alcohol and indulging in too much night life," he said.

For couples planning to get married, Chan said 2009 is it. The "wedding star" is at the center of the magic square this year, which means people will generally be lucky in love.

For eligible bachelors, Chan suggested that they put flowers in a long-necked vase and place it on the right side of the main door of the house if they wish to attract women.

Women looking for a little romance, on the other hand, may consider putting flowers in a vase made of metal, especially brass, and have them displayed on the left side of the door.

Those born in the Year of the Ox will be lucky for those born in the Year of the Rat, Tiger, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Monkey and Rooster, Chan added.

Puno calls for moral force, says it should show self

By Jaime Laude

At a meeting with Fr. Robert Reyes earlier in the day, Puno noted that the country had no many laws but was lacking in morality.

Reyes said Puno mostly smiled and did not say anything when he (Reyes) mentioned that Malacañang may be behind the talk of the plot to oust the Chief Justice out of the Supreme Court to make way for Charter change that many critics believed was meant to extend the term of President Macapagal-Arroyo.

The impeachment talk stemmed from the Chief Justice's alleged non-promulgation of a decision of the high court dated July 13, 2000, which supposedly upheld the disqualification of Negros Oriental Rep. Jocelyn Limkaichong due to questions about her citizenship.

The complaint would allegedly be spearheaded by the Presidential party mates in the Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino District of the Pres Filipino, Kampi), veteran syndicate, Gloria Pania, lost to Limkaichong.

Puno is the wife of former Rep. Antero Pania, a Kampi member.

A complaint against Puno was filed by one Louis Biraogo with the high court, who claimed that his allegations were based on a copy of the supposedly unpromulgated decision that was sent to him by a Supreme Court lawyer.

Ready to face impeachment

Puno said he was prepared to face up to any attempt to remove him from office through impeachment.

"It is not in our hands. If they proceed with that move, then let it be," Puno said. "We cannot prevent it. We'll meet it when it happens. I'm in perfect peace."

However, he said he was concerned that the expected moves to have him impeached could have devastating effects on the independent judiciary.

Bigger stake

"I like to think that I'm just an instrument in this fight. The bigger stake is the independence of the judiciary. If we lose the independence of the judiciary ... If we lose the independence of the judiciary democracy could die," Puno said.

He said that the case that was supposedly being used to drag his name into the controversy was decided by the entire Supreme Court.

"The court itself has already explained what happened to the case. And this is a position taken collectively by the 15 justices," he said.

"So, if they think there is fault in that collective stand of the 15 justices why don't they complain about the entire court. Why are they trying to pin the blame on a single person. When the entire court has explained that this is not my decision alone but the decision of the entire court," he added.

Palace discourages move

Malacañang yesterday discouraged reported efforts to unseat Puno, saying he should be spared from the impeachment process.

"The efforts to impeach Chief Justice Reynato Puno over alleged lapses that he committed a leadership lapse contribute to the growing trivialization of the impeachment process," Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said from a statement.

"Impeachment has been the most popular political blood sport; a yearly ritual our dispossessed national politics cannot seem to live without," he said, referring to the experience of Ms Arroyo.

At the Anvil business group meeting, Puno said the economy needed "leaders with moral character."

Confucius

Taking off from the political and ethical teachings of Chinese philosopher Confucius, Puno said the country's leaders could not afford to lose the people's faith.

"The wisdom of Confucius' answers speak for themselves. More than economic prosperity, more than military might, government needs the trust of the people in order to govern effectively," Puno said.

He told the country's new fifth generation "new economists on the lessons that governments that forfeit the trust of the people have unhappy ends."

Puno said a leader should be able to lead by his own example.

"There is dear an unbending obligation on the part of those who lead governments to preside in moral ballast. A government that is morally fragile cannot withstand the rolls that will inflict it. To be sure, a government afflicted with moral leprosy deserves nothing but the graveyard," Puno warned.

Forgiving leaders

"We need leaders with moral character. History tells us that people will forgive leaders for lapses in ability but will not forgive those who slip in character. Character is who we are when no one is watching," he said.

In the meeting with Reyes, Puno spoke mostly about his childhood in the province and how his own father worked hard not only to provide for the family but also to instill in his children values such as obedience and respect.

Reyes said Puno appeared to be reflecting on the erosion of the Filipino's moral values.

Reyes said that it was Puno, a Methodist, who pointed out that the "hurt my system is based on our morality which is based on our spirituality."

Reyes said that apparently Puno would not make any bold move amid the talk of impeaching him to clear the Gloria camp members.

"He just wants to let it (issue) pass quietly and die a natural death," Reyes said.

Don't make issue bigger

In fact, how that moving issue distracts Puno from what he want to make the issue any bigger, Reyes said.

Reyes told the lawyers that he convinced Puno's office on Monday to declare him that he would be holding a Mass in front of the Supreme Court with some lawmen from Hacienda Yulo in support of the Chief Justice.

"The Chief Justice did not want to up to the idea," Reyes said.

But the prime president and said Supreme Court spokesperson Midas Marquez, (The Lawyer) could personally see Puno in hand him their letter of support.

"The (Puno) agreed to see me each time lawmen. I only asked for five minutes but he gave me 45 minutes of his time," Reyes said. With a report from Christine F. Esguerra

PUNO, in speech delivered at Ateneo Business Club Wednesday night, cites principles of good governance from Chinese philosopher Confucius. MIGUEL DE GUZMAN

9 dead in flash floods, storm surges, landslides

By Jaime Laude

The cold mail of a cold front sweeping through the country's eastern seaboard had brought heavy rains across 12 provinces from northern Luzon to the eastern sections of the Visayas and Mindanao since last week, the NDCC said.

The agency said 87,669 families or about 393,388 people had been "affected."

Parts of Mimaria Occidental and Mimaria Oriental remain submerged, while continuing heavy rains have limited the navigation of air passengers flights and seafarer by small domestic carriers.

Schools also remain closed, while satellite events in Agusan del Norte have led to flooding.

Landslides and flooding were reported in coastal Bicol, while small-scale flooding was also reported near Cagayan.

State of emergency plea

President Macapagal-Arroyo was asked yesterday to declare a state of emergency in Misamis Occidental, including Cagayan de Oro City.

"The situation there is unprecedented ... I am appealing to the President to declare a state of emergency there and provide assistance in the process," Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr. said in a phone interview.

Strong winds, heavy rains and waves as high as 2 meters sent thousands of people fleeing from coastlines and storm-battle in three cities and 16 towns in Misamis Oriental on Tuesday.

More rains expected

Weather officials predicted more rains in the area in the coming days.

At least three people, including a 6-year-old boy, were reported dead. Two others were missing.

Authorities said many people in coastal villages were trapped on rooftops when the floods rose until dawn Wednesday.

Panic set in when text messages spread about a tornado. A whirlwind was overheard in Mindoro town in Misamis Occidental, but no casualties were reported.

40,000 evacuees

Provincial officials said at least 40,000 people had been transferred to shelters. Most carried nothing but the clothes they were wearing, they said.

"What have I done wrong that this happened to my family?" asked Silvio Tumalan. His family was among the hundreds of people evacuated from Isla Verde, a small island straddling the swollen Cagayan River.

Zenaida Bandiano said her family had to flee to higher ground for the second time in a week due to the floods. "We just renovated home. We did not sleep last night due to incessant rains," she sighed as the rising water crept into her home.

Provincial administrator Michiels Gahuzina said that while food supply was still enough, the evacuees also needed medicines, beddings, kitchen wares and potable water.

The Provincial Disaster Coordinating Council (PDCC) reported that the bridge connecting Medina town and Gingoog City had been rendered impassable by the floods.

Power supply disrupted

Communications are also difficult in the towns of Initiagang, Talisayan, Medina and Gingoog City as the provinces that had been powering the fewer communication towns to Gingoog City cutoff out due to the floods," Teddy Lobregas of the PDCC said.

Strongs on infrastructure was initially placed at P50 million.

Big waves swept more than 50 houses in villages along the Macajalar Bay.

"Where will I go now?" said Maria Sarjentes, one of the victims in Barangay Cagayan.

Aida Tudio, of Barangay Bayabas, said the residents were scared when they saw waves as high as 3 meters battering houses. "It was the worst one I have seen since I lived here 28 years ago," he said.

Rudy Nunez, president of the Cagayan de Oro Chamber of Commerce, told the Inquirer that the flood also spelled losses to businesses.

"Establishments are flooded, workers could not report to work. They are forced to close shops in the meantime while the weather is still wreaking havoc," Nunez said.

Storm surge

Salingsa said officials were appealing to public and private agencies and individuals for help in meeting the immediate needs of the victims. Donors can contact the PDCC communication center at 88822-7267/8.

In Limasawa, Lanao del Norte, a storm surge damaged more than 100 houses along the coastal areas on Tuesday night.

Falling trunnies were also cut power supply to some areas of the town, Limasawa Mayor Noel Dream told the Inquirer. "The engineering team of Lanao del Sur Electric Cooperative is still working to restore power," he said.

A state of calamity was declared yesterday.

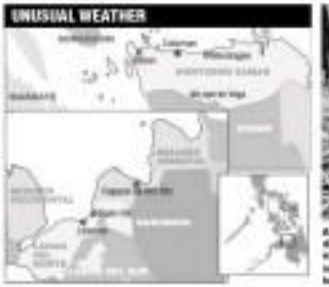
In Iligan City, more than 500 families were also affected by a storm surge and flash flood, according to Mayor Lawrence Cruz.

Cruz said a rescue team was also deployed to help residents of Barangay Tubod, who were trapped by rising waters.

In Sulu, some 1,700 people fled their homes when big waves hit the coastal village of Bandakan in Bongaotao town on Sunday night.

"They were not able to bring with them their belongings," Bongaotao Mayor Ahmad Hassib said.

Abdulwahab Mohamad, social welfare provincial director, said 60 houses were destroyed and 99 others were damaged by the waves.



AFTERMATH. More people have died and nearly 200,000 have been displaced in flash floods and landslides due to heavy rains across the Visayas and Mindanao. Residents (above) of Limasawa, a coastal town in Lanao del Norte, salvage what they can from their destroyed homes.

The victims are taking shelter at the Andalusian Elementary School.

Northern Samar

In Northern Samar, the PDCC reported that over 11,000 families were displaced by flooding.

Fourteen fishermen who were reported missing in Leyte and Southern Leyte returned home, the regional office of the Office of Civil Defense said.

As of Wednesday, flooding still submerged five of Southern Samar's 24 towns, according to Israel Belonino, PDCC administrative officer. These were Bobon, Catarman, Lawaan, Lope de Vega and Mondragon, which is the hardest hit.

Two persons drowned in Catarman, according to police report. They were identified as Steve Camille, 31, of Barangay Sto. Rosario Poblacion, and Rita Bello, of Barangay Pinamitinan.

That brought to eight the number of landslides reported after days of incessant heavy rains that caused floods and landslides in the province.

Gov. Brad Daza and PDCC officials are set to meet today on whether to declare a state of calamity in the province, he said.

Stranded

A total of 4,032 passengers onboard cars, trucks, buses and boats were stranded in the ports of Matnog in Sorsogon, Pio in Catanduanes, Legaspi City and Tabaco in Albay as of 11 a.m. Wednesday due to waves as high as six meters, the Philippine Coast Guard reported. *Reports from Christine O. Avendaño and Jerome Aning in Misamis; Jaehe B. Alquisola, Mel Gwilda Rodrigues, Jimmy Alberto and Gilbert Bivel, Inquirer Mindanao; Joey Gelbero and Rachel V. Arnaiz, Inquirer Visayas; Ephraim Aguilar, Inquirer Southern Luzon; and AFP*

Baguio City temperatures plunge to 9.4 °C

By Jaime Laude

the boundary between cold and warm air that produces heavy precipitation.

"The heavy rains we are experiencing now are evidence that we are having a wet season that is warmer than usual. It is abnormal but not highly unusual. It happens," Pagasa weather bureau chief Nathaniel Cruz said.

For the rest of Luzon, Cruz said a surge of the northeast monsoon—icy wind blowing in from the northern hemisphere experienced from October to March—was triggering rain showers and cold temperatures.

Positive feedback

The 9.4 degrees Celsius recorded on Wednesday morning was the coldest this year, but organizers of the Panagbenga remained and the annual flower festival were not complaining. They said they were praying for an even colder spell to get much-needed tourists.

The Flower Festival, or Panagbenga, opens on Feb. 1.

Anthony de Leon, project manager of the Baguio Country Club, said the time into industry had received positive feedback from tourists who appreciated a cooler Baguio.

De Leon, the festival chair, said the sponsorship packages they earned for this year's flower festival, the 16th to be staged since 1995, only reached last year's take.

The festival normally earns 90 million but spends up to P5 million each year, he said.

Commercial celebrations

This year's Panagbenga would not progress linked to Baguio's centennial celebration.

Michael Shannon, the centennial commissioner in charge of monitoring, said the 2007 arbor centennial projects were done, leaving even less support from big businesses, compared to Panagbenga.

"Money is not easy this year. If the economy is down, it's harder to get [marketing support]," Shannon said.

He said it was even harder to convince companies that celebrating the city's 100th year had more marketing value than the annual flower festival.

De Leon said the revenues from tourism also come for the cold weather should help shore up these programs.

Profit from the cold

The coldest morning experienced in Baguio was on Jan. 18, 1961, when the temperature plunged to 6.5 degrees Celsius.

Pagasa's Salvador Glenares said the northeast monsoon had peaked and would bring in cold winds until February.

Ganging by the chick jockey acid is seen "okay, okay"—unconditional fun outlets—every night in downtown Baguio, even the underground tanks in entertaining to people from the cold. With reports from Alexis Rapa in Manila and Rhoecar Cabreza and Rowelyn Love Hinoto in Baguio

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OPINION

Growing warmer

SOME MAY STILL QUIBBLE WITH THE ASSERTION, as formulated the other day by a former environment secretary, that the marked rise in temperature in the last decade is "caused entirely by human action." But unless you are Sarah Palin, there should be no argument that global warming is a fact and that human beings are responsible for much or most of it.

EDITORIAL

The inconvenient truth is, the world is rushing toward an ecologically unstable—and therefore economically uncertain—future.

Elisea Gozun, formerly secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, drew a blank scenario at the launch on Tuesday of "The Philippine Imperative." There is trouble for Metro Manila. "Pagasa estimates that a one-meter rise in Manila Bay will lead to 5,000 hectares being inundated and two million people will already be displaced," she said.

There is even more trouble ahead for other parts of the country. "The distribution of rainfall is changing and we will have more intense and longer drought and intense typhoons." Drought will likely be severe in Western Mindanao while Central Luzon will suffer the opposite. "Take note, you have Central Luzon, they're our food source and they'll have increased rainfall."

Of course, some of this necessary scenario-building is extrapolation, based on such data points as the spike to the average rise in sea levels from 1.8 mm per year in the three decades since 1961 to 3.1 mm per year in the 10 years between 1993 and 2003. But many of the scenarios are based, not on future projections, but on actual, alarming experience. Speaking at the same forum, for instance, Lory Tan of the World Wildlife Fund for Nature said that the aquifer supplying the Mimaropa provinces has already been found to be contaminated with saline water.

What is what happens when sea levels rise; saline water seeps into freshwater sources. And sea levels are rising—and weather patterns are changing—in large part because human society is choking the atmosphere with enormous amounts of carbon emissions.

It is thus a source of encouragement that businessmen like Federico Lopez of FirstGen recognize that power companies are a part of the problem and should form part of the solution. "As the major power-generating company in the energy sector that accounts for over 50 percent of the country's carbon emissions, we're committed to reducing the carbon intensity of our electricity generation and developing more sustainable solutions for the country," Lopez told us the forum.

But it is not only industry or institutions that are responsible; taken together, individuals (driving cars, using air conditioners, etc.) leave a huge carbon footprint. That is why the "Imperative" should be supported by everyone with a stake in the future.

Let us be clear: "The Philippine Imperative" is only a short-term, consensus-building campaign. How short-term? Six months short, marked by several milestones including a "People's Summit" in April and culminating in a "Business Summit." Said lead convener Neric Acosta, formerly a congressman from Bukidnon: "This is so peculiar in the sense that this is the first time that ... a private sector-led initiative [is] actually coming up with a national solution to the problem of environmental degradation."

The idea is to put our heads together. The road map will come at the end of the consultations.

It is true that, if leading companies that are part of the "Imperative" like FirstGen and Filipinas Shell and SM do their part, the country's carbon footprint would shrink over time. But the need is for Philippine carbon emissions to shrink significantly, and fast. For that to happen, ordinary citizens and consumers must make the initiative their own too. How, to give only one possible example, can a carpool lane to the country's major cities be expected to work, if executives and executives don't "buy" the "Imperative"?

This brings us to the government, both national and local. The "Imperative" might just succeed and create a workable road map because the private sector is leading the way, but the destination, wherever it is, cannot be reached without the government's help. Laws to sanction bad behavior, rules to enable compliance with certain initiatives, incentives to reward reductions in emissions—there's a whole slew of interventions the government can do to help fight global warming.

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Then and now

VIEWPOINT

Jose L. Mercado

OVER SWAP BARREL DIY THIS FEB. THE names of those linked to today's murky plan to impeach Supreme Court Chief Justice Reynato Puno. Then, replace them with those involved in the failed 2003 coup to oust Puno's predecessor, Chief Justice Hilario Davide. You will get a time capsule of Midnight Special Edition. Throw out to right. History's enigmatic lesson is nothing changes, yet everything is completely different.

Change. Eduardo Cojuangco's name with that of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Much, much the same of Enrile. Mr. Arroyo's party now that of Cojuangco's batomaker Danding's Coalition. In 2003, NPC targeted the self-effacing but steely-firm Davide. In 2008, the victim to be is the low-key and equally independent Puno.

Carrots just not on Puno's "guillotine," a draft decision on disbarred candidate Dinia Pano' petition to oust Rep. Jocelyn Limbaring of Negros Oriental has been leaked by Inter Local Bitsyo. "Who, he?" Bitsyo protestations himself to be clueless. Then goes forewarn. He has now started attacking Puno on the Internet for allegedly derailing the presidential petition of the Pano faction as NPC factionally-tinctured Davide then.

Then cannot become a credible impeachment complaint," former Sen. Franklin Drilon points out. Neither can her former congressmate husband, Jacinto. "Politically Puno is like a dried prune," Sen. Aquilino Pimentel asserts. Hitting hit.

Hitting hit has both door—and motive. "If this is impeachable, we will support it," Quezon Rep. Danilo Suarez stormed. Kung solons are political quacks to science—they will vote wherever the wind blows.

Kampi moves to throw the hands NPC mustered (14) when it assembled Davide then. Campaign's two cons, pia mahaba Gilbert Teodoro, headed the "Bet Dick." Then kibitzers included Ramon Bagatsing, Gilbert Remulla and others better forgotten

Superstar of Obama Cabinet

FORMER DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE Hillary Clinton, President-elect Obama's nominee for secretary of state, appeared at the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee's confirmation hearing last Tuesday and it was, in the words of a CNN correspondent, "almost like a coronation." Clinton is expected to get no less than unanimous support from the committee chaired by Sen. John Kerry, also a former Democratic presidential candidate, where it was evident that she was the superstar of the Obama team, as evidenced by the number of high-level briefings.

But counting the lady in the brown pantsuit was no longer the candidate talking to students on the campaign trail or to millions of voters of all backgrounds, but the senior New York senator examining her peers in Congress about what—and how—they would recommend to the next administration. Indeed, Senator Clinton will soon be the point person of US foreign policy in straightforward terms, which means the projects of this point person have considerable clout. Her remarks, as quoted by Agence France-Presse, by contrast, did mostly in those cases pertain to the Bush administration's record.

POLITICAL TIDBITS

Belinda Olivares-Cunanan

In assuming the task of stabilizing Iraq, President Barack Obama will have obviously felt she had to step in to prevent further deterioration in relations among the various agencies involved in ring control and rehabilitation. And it was good she did, for the Iraq war has been going on for years. Overall failing to police agents over the years who fattened their fund had work to apprehending weapons would just go down the drain when a prosecutor just let them go because Lt. Gen. Raymond Odierno (Ret.) and Amb. James Jeffrey pushed it a town in his previous post as head of the prosecution. Such opinions raise suspicions that some prosecutors or judges were bribed, but the reality could also be that apprehending agents simply failed to make tactical errors, in that search have little option but to release the suspects.

The recent brouhaha about the shaking boys' discord criticism has caused the spotlight to focus anew on many related issues and problems. They include the need for closer cooperation between the executive branch and the judiciary, as well as on sending laws, for reforms in our judicial system to tackle problems such as the stand-proof installation of cases (of the PHP6 nearly 200,000 cases filed from 2000-2008, 78 percent remains unresolved as the government itself) and an increase in salaries of agents and prosecutors, to make them less vulnerable to bribes and work more efficiently. There's also the need for closer cooperation between families, schools, church and commercial establishments such as clubs, bars, etc., to curb the menace to our youth. In this regard, the call of PNP Director General Jesse Velasco for a summit among stakeholders should be considered.

• • •

Music was very much a part of the Christmas season for us. While in Poznan, Poland, last month for the global climate change conference, we had a chance to attend a free Christmas concert featuring an all-male ensemble at St. Adalbert, a small church near our hotel, one very cold evening. The songs were mostly traditional ones sung in Polish, so that when a male singer rendered "Silent Night" (which was originally composed as a German carol) in unaccompanied, our response to "Cicha Noc" was to sing along in English. Another concert came when we rather late "Best" Odierno invited us to his home for a performance by 24 young college students belonging to the Ateneo College Glee Club under the direction of Ms. Gemelin Tolentino. "Heroes" by Peter Cetera topped songs from around the world in their one-unique style, including Aretha-based African carols, ending with the Ateneo Hymn. As we enjoyed their rendered "O Holy Night" and "Mandirri," the students, Tolentino and Executive Director Jo Bonoan, both members of the Ateneo Alumni Glee Club, joining in. The Ateneo College Glee Club boasts of existing of triumphs, the latest being First Prize at Kyoto, Japan, considered one of the "Olympics" for choral competitions. This year it is scheduled to do a tour of the United States and Canada. The College Glee Club and the Alumni Glee Club are also planning a joint concert this year.

• • •

With the welfare of the Filipino family in mind, I am posting this reminder: Nonresidents Manila offices in this weekend but in seminar for 2009 for couples with troubled marriages/concerns. Friday, Jan. 16, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 17, at the Pavilion Hotel, 400 Roxas Boulevard, Ermita, Manila. The "RCB Theodore Zapata, Las Piñas) Rivera, the Narcisas Maladies, Tullahan Tenejeros Rivers, and connecting waterways and esteros in Metro Manila. The MWSS, as the principal implementor of programs and projects for flood control and sewerage, and one of the country's chief water utilities, shall remove and demolish all structures, constructions, and other encroachments built in breach of PD 1067 and other applicable laws, rules and regulations along the Marikina River, the Pasig River, the Navotas-Malabon-Tullahan-Tenejeros Rivers, and connecting waterways and esteros in Metro Manila. The MWSS, as the principal implementor of programs and projects for flood control and sewerage, and one of the country's chief water utilities, shall remove and demolish all structures, constructions, and other encroachments built in breach of PD 1067 and other applicable laws, rules and regulations along the Marikina River, the Pasig River, the Navotas-Malabon-Tullahan-Tenejeros Rivers, the Ortigas Diamond River, the Intas (Cartin) River, the Laguna De Bay, and other rivers, connecting waterways, and esteros that discharge wastewater into the Manila Bay. In addition, the MWSS shall construct 10 new esteros, and maintain a sanitary landfill, as prescribed by RA 9003, within a period of one (1) year from finality of this Decision.

(9) The DENR shall, as directed by Art. 74 of IRR of RA 9275, RA 9003, DPWH Dept. Order No. 64, Series of 2003, and other applicable laws, rules and regulations, determine if all locators/operators of industries and business establishments located or built in violation of RA 7279, and other applicable laws among the Barangay Marikina Heights, Fort Bonifacio, Taguig City; San Juan Estero, the "RCB Theodoro Zapata, Las Piñas) Rivers, the Navotas-Malabon-Tullahan-Tenejeros Rivers, and connecting waterways and esteros in Metro Manila. The MWSS, as the principal implementor of programs and projects for flood control and sewerage, and one of the country's chief water utilities, shall remove and demolish all structures, constructions, and other encroachments built in breach of PD 1067 and other applicable laws, rules and regulations along the Marikina River, the Pasig River, the Navotas-Malabon-Tullahan-Tenejeros Rivers, the Ortigas Diamond River, the Intas (Cartin) River, the Laguna De Bay, and other rivers, connecting waterways, and esteros that discharge wastewater into the Manila Bay. In addition, the MWSS shall construct 10 new esteros, and maintain a sanitary landfill, as prescribed by RA 9003, within a period of one (1) year from finality of this Decision.

(9) The DENR shall, as directed by Art. 74 of IRR of RA 9275, RA 9003, DPWH Dept. Order No. 64, Series of 2003, and other applicable laws, rules and regulations, determine if all locators/operators of industries and business have the proper facilities for the treatment and disposal of local sludge and sewage coming from septic tanks.

(10) The DBM shall consider incorporating an additional budget for personal services, maintenance and other operating expenses, environmental protection...

(11

Solution to the Mindanao problem

MANY EFFORTS HAVE BEEN MADE BY various groups and concerned citizens to bring peace back to Mindanao: "Caravan for Peace," "Walk for Peace," "Bike for Peace," "Tri-people Constitution Dialogue," "Stop War," and many others... all directed toward finding a solution to decades of armed conflict in the region. But were these efforts worth of forms?

The problem in Mindanao started in the 1900s when the Moro forces permitted the entry of Christian settlers into the "promised land." The unabated influx of Christians reduced the territory occupied by the Moros and other indigenous peoples, who were left with nowhere to go, no land to till, no job and no future to look forward to. The Christians became the dominant force in Mindanao.

The Moro should have preserved their culture-related ownership... an absolute land ownership; nobody in the family could claim absolute ownership over family properties; lands were owned by all, and every Moro was only a caretaker, guardian and protector of the land of their forefathers, as were those who came before them.

Why do Kuya, Bhenjoyan and Fuentes difficult to find and capture? These commanders represent the Moro people—their sustenance, their aspirations, their hope and future. These commanders are considered (though their deeds) saviors of the Moro people, and the Moros look up to them as leaders who, in the future, will regain their lost territories and free them from the domination of non-Moros. The surrender or capture of these commanders would mean the defeat of the Moro people.

The way in Mindanao will never end unless the original Moro dominion is given back to them or unless the Moros who were stripped of their lands are justly compensated. So here or amount of the subsequent effort, community-building and assistance can solve the Mindanao problem. The solution is to give back to the Moros what belongs to him.

—EDWIN M. ARELLA,
Pilar, Cotabato

If you have any complaints, grievances or suggestions about the treatment of cases and photos by the Inquirer, you may write to the Readers' Advocate, Philippine Daily Inquirer, Chino Roces Avenue, corner Yague and Mascardo Streets, City of Makati or send a fax to No. 897-4795, 897-4794, or e-mail readersadvocate@inquirer.com.ph

Writers of letters to the editor are requested to include their complete address and telephone or pager number or e-mail address for verification purposes. The Inquirer will not publish any letter unless such information is supplied.

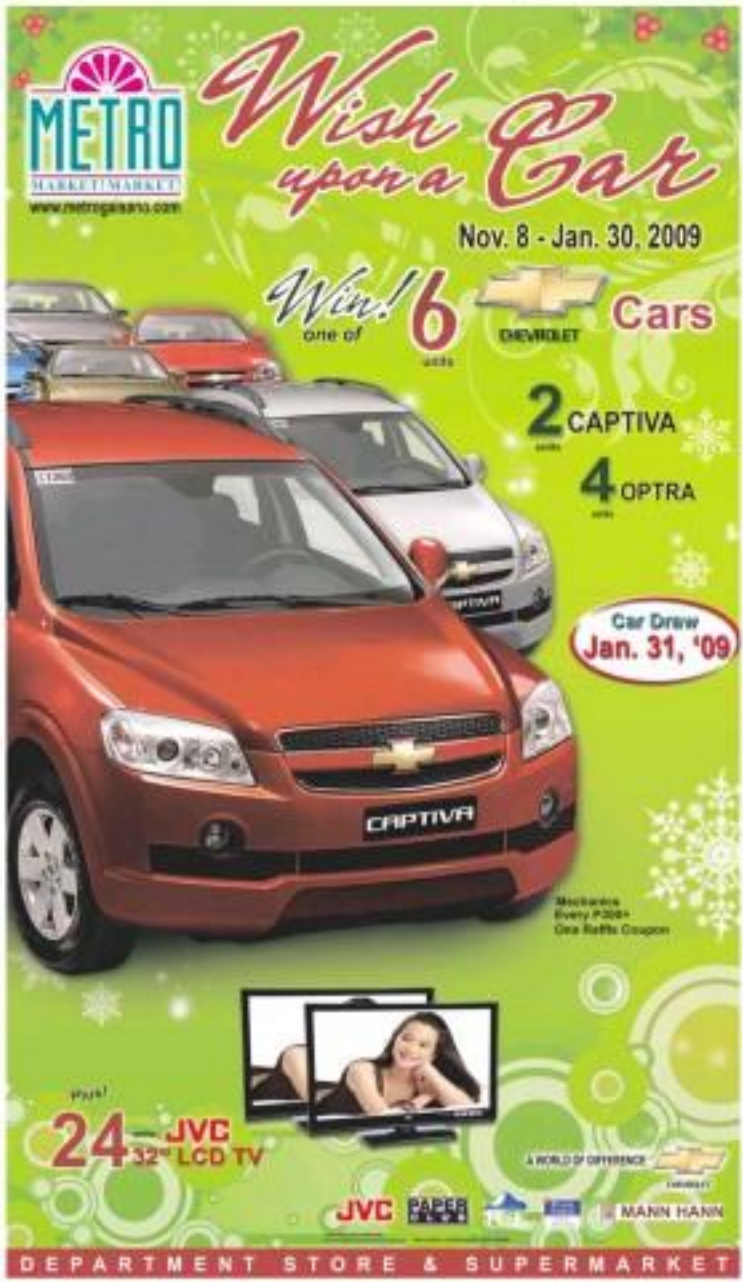
Kaya Natin! supports Pardillo

WE, THE FOUNDING MEMBERS AND LEADers of Kaya Natin!, a national movement that promotes good governance and ethical leadership, condemn in the strongest possible terms the unlawful and inappropriate actions of dismissed and public enemy of the province of Pampanga named the Office of the Governor last Jan. 5, 2009. We believe that such behavior not only disrespected their governor, Eddie Panlilio, and the people of Pampanga, it also unnecessarily endangered the lives of many innocent people.

We are saddened by and very disappointed in those acts of cruelty, as the people response-ble for upholding the law did nothing while the duly-constituted authorities of the province were unjustly threatened. These inaction betrayed the common manner by which laws are enforced in the locality, contrary to the precepts of good governance.

We support Governor Panlilio in his call to restore the injustice done. While we recognize the freedom of everyone to peaceably express their views, such freedom must be exercised within the bounds of decency and the rule of law. We appeal to the protesters not to take the law into their hands but instead invest their re-

spect to the elected leaders of Pampanga. We appeal to the Sangguniang Panlalawigan to act with



GMA given enough time; history to judge her

IT SEEMS THAT MOST SOPO STORIES COMing from the White House these days are about George W. Bush seemingly on a sprint to the finish line of his presidency to leave a legacy of good stuff.

It is true that history judges presidents. History is not treated Harry Truman and Franklin Roosevelt kindly. Truman's frankness and honesty are legendary. He was often called "Give 'em hell Harry," and his reply was: I just told people the truth and they thought it was hell. Roosevelt became president when America was mired in the Great Depression and despair. Although many of the programs he launched to help impoverished citizens were not always successful, his absolute dedication to his battling nation is a historical fact.

Now comes Bush and his efforts to reshape history, borne of the decisions by the self-described "decider" will color his presidency for years to come. The man who popularized open the American people that took them to war and the reckless fiscal policies that doubled the national debt during his reign are heavy burdens to be borne by future generations. His overdrive is that if Bush should be granted an opportunity to look back and see how history has judged his presidency, that lofty status he wishes for will have disappeared like a pipe dream, as have the hopes and dreams of many Americans during his time in office.

Overall, when George W. Bush was sworn in as a second-year day in January 2001 in Washington, D.C., Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo was celebrating her ascendancy to the most powerful position in her country. Today, she is barely surviving.

Unlike Bush, who is leaving in two- or three-weeks after eight years in office, Ms Arroyo has until 2010 to complete her term.

President Arroyo was quoted as saying only God can judge whether she has been good or bad.

Arroyo reiterated the statement in an interview she made during her first day in office and she said she doesn't want to be known as a "great President" but a "good President." She said in the end, God and not history will be the one to judge what she has done.

The NBN-ZTE deal scandal, the "Hello, Garci" scandal, the unsettled war with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the killings and disappearances of journalists and media men, and the unabated appointments of friends and cronies to key Cabinet positions are events and anomalies that define the Arroyo presidency.

Right now, if Gloria Arroyo have given life Arroyo a failing grade. She has just about two years left to heal the Filipino nation, to improve her image, cure her legacy, and restore herself a favorable place in history. She should not leave it to Garci to judge her. God may not be listening.

How much more suffering she is going to cause the Filipino people for them to finally say, "No, we have given Ms Arroyo enough time."

—HENRY ABELLE,
rarelle@yahoo.com

Better water service means better life

FIRST OF ALL, PIC WOULD LIKE TO EXTEND our gratitude to Manila Water for all the wonderful things it is bringing into our lives. We really appreciate its efforts in improving our communities. Manila Water has brought about significant changes in our lives.

We can recall the days when we did not have water in our taps. We remember the days when our water would come out of our faucets, if at all, in drips. All of those things are now past. Today, we are enjoying 24 hours of water service. It takes us only a few minutes to fill our water containers since the pressure is very high. Anyone living in areas above Manila Water is sure that it is a company that does not just to make profit; it also fulfills its moral responsibility to the communities.

I wish that all the companies here in the Philippines would be like Manila Water—it always for change and progress.

—RICARDO JIMENEZ,
chair, Barangay Balong Bato,
San Juan City

Across the NATION

Terror suspect, 12 others bolt jail

NATURE'S FURY
Residents of the coastal town of Linamon, Lanao del Norte find themselves without homes after a storm surge left their community in tatters Jan. 13. (Story on Page A11)

Inmates crawl out of cell through 10-ft tunnel they dug

ZAMBOANGA CITY—AT LEAST 12 PRISONERS, ONE OF THEM A terror suspect, bolted the Sulu provincial jail by digging a tunnel and with the help of some villagers, police said yesterday.

Thirteen were escaping but jail guards shot dead one of them. The escapees included one of Sulu's most-wanted criminals.

The escape took place Tuesday but Senior Supt. Jolasim Rasul, Sulu police chief, said police delayed reporting it because operations to capture the escapees were going on.

Rasul, quoting the jail warden, said one of the fugitives was shot dead while he tried to crawl out of the tunnel that had been previously dug with the help of some villagers.

He said police launched a "wide-scale manhunt operation" to capture the 12 fugitives.

Rasul said most of the escapees were "very notorious" and are facing murder charges.

"One is the most wanted man in Sulu and the other one is an Abu Sayyaf suspect, who was jailed for illegal possession of firearms," he said.

He identified the escapees as Bhguindinan Sahilan, a suspected member of the terrorist group Abu Sayyaf; Muhairi Asadji, the most wanted man in the province and Muhaimin Edi, Abdusad Alpa, Dan-Negar Kiram, Pintari Jutti, Adhaira, Bensasir Wasiji, Adari Dhora Jr., Ming Tomas, Ronald Ballano, Sulip Hasan Asmad and Mubalira Asbaira.

The slain fugitive was identified as Edgar Jadan Hayan.

Rasul said the fugitives, occupying cell No. 7, dug a 10-foot long tunnel leading to the back of the provincial jail, which is next to the provincial capitol annex building.

> "The prisoners covered [the tunnel] with books, reading materials and praying rugs..."

Quoting provincial jail warden Hadji Aquilal Jimjali, Rasul said jail guards regularly conducted inspection but did not notice the digging "because the prisoners covered the portion with books, reading materials and praying rugs."

On Tuesday at around 4:30 a.m., Rasul said the prisoners broke free by crawling out of the tunnel, which has a diameter of 2.6 inches.

"We have alerted all the municipal police stations and instructed them to coordinate with the families of those who escaped so we can immediately recover them," he said.

Rasul said police were also trying to establish the identity of the villagers who helped the prisoners link and when their main participation was. Julie Alipala, Inquirer Mindanao

Leyte church starts feeling crunch, too

By Joey A. Gabieta
Inquirer Visayas

TACLOBAN CITY—THE ECONOMIC crunch is making its presence felt in the Archdiocese of Palo in Leyte as priests and faithful there are devising ways to improve their parishes' finances.

Faced by dwindling Mass donations, priests and lay groups agreed to establish finance councils in all of the archdiocese's 84 parishes, 13 missions and two quasi-parishes.

The decision was reached by close to 600 delegates from the various parishes and missions in the Archdiocese of Palo who gathered last Jan. 10 for an archdiocesan congress on parish organizational structures held at the Sacred Heart Seminary in Palo to mark Archbishop John Forest his feast day.

The parish finance council is to be headed by the parish priest with three to nine members who have knowledge about finance-related matters and who live within the parish, according to Msgr. Bernardo Nieto, parish priest of the Saints Peter and Paul Church of Dennis Day.

Parish is admitted that the parishes are experiencing low collections but he could not say how much was the decline.

Amid dwindling donations, the finance councils will be out in raising funds since the parishes still have to meet various needs that require more funds as communities are improving church facilities. The council will assist the priest in coming up with programs and projects that will help improve the parishioners and how it could handle its earnings. Desiree Caduli

"Not all the priests have the know-how on financial matters. The parish finance council will help the parish priest on this regard," he added.

New road project linked to Sierra Madre logging

LUCENA CITY—A ₱300 project that traverses Sierra Madre may have provided easy access to illegal loggers in Quezon's official said.

Nilo Tanseco, regional executive director of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources in Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, Quezon), said the road project stretches from the Tanauling Highway in Real and Laguna to Infanta, Quezon.

The Mauban-Infanta road project passes along the slopes of Sierra Madre.

Tanseco said he received intelligence reports that illegal loggers transport undocumented lumber in the guise of hauling construction materials for the road project.

Tanseco said his logs from Sierra Madre used to be smuggled out through Tayay but it was stopped with the help of the DENR, military and municipal officials.

He said the DENR welcomes calls to investigate alleged corruption in DENR offices related to logging.

"My office is more than willing to extend its full cooperation," Tanseco said.

Tanseco said the Task Force Sierra Madre (TFSM), a multi-sectoral anti-illegal logging watchdog, didn't need the go-signal of the DENR to investigate corruption in the government agency.

"Since they are an independent body, they no longer need to ask permission from us," he said.

The TFSM alleged that warrays DENR personnel are in connivance with illegal logging in Sierra Madre.

Fr. Fito Montellano, TFSM chair, said his group needed DENR cooperation, however.

"How can we initiate an in-depth probe when we don't have the official authority and power? We will just be given the usual turnaround in the DENR offices which we were investigated," Montellano said.

Tanseco said DENR operatives were able to seize 220 cubic meters of illegally cut forest products, 21 units of vehicles used in the transport of illegal forest products and one chainsaw. Delfin T. Mallari Jr., Inquirer Southern Luzon

NEWSBRIEFS

■ BACOLOD CITY

Cops step up spy work

CHIEF SUPT. Isagani Cuenan, Western Visayas police director, has ordered tighter intelligence work amid reports that crime groups from Central Visayas are operating in Bacolod City.

Cuenan said police visibility in the city would also be increased because of reports that crime groups from Central Visayas have linked up with their counterparts in Negros Occidental. Carla P. Gomez, Inquirer Visayas

■ ILOILO CITY

Reward raised for killers

A CASH REWARD of ₱75,000 has been raised to help solve last week's murder of an Iloilo tricycle businessman in Ajuy town in Iloilo.

Senior Supt. Ricardo dela Paz, Iloilo provincial police director, said the cash was included ₱50,000 from the local government of Ajuy led by Mayor Jeanette Mabini and ₱25,000 from a group headed by provincial board member and former Ajuy Mayor Jett Rojas.

He vowed will be given to anyone who can give information leading to the arrest of the murderers of Wenceslao Ibdi.

The suspect shared family members and neighbors with a knife, police said. When police came, Regalario attacked one policeman, wounding him slightly.

Dolly T. Mallari Jr., Inquirer Southern Luzon

Rubber killed in clash

ONE OF THREE suspected robbers was killed in a clash with police in Barangay Isabang in the outskirts of Lucena last Thursday.

Police were conducting a follow-up operation on a robbery case when three gunmen armed with a .45-cal. pistol and a .38-cal. revolver opened fire on them.

One of the suspects, identified as Alfred Nonas, died on the spot. The two other suspects escaped.

Dolly T. Mallari Jr., Inquirer Southern Luzon

■ CITY OF CABANATUAN

Air Force man shot dead

AN AIR FORCE man was shot dead and his brother hurt in a commotion involving a police officer in the autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao on Sunday.

City police chief Senior Supt. Willie Dangane identified the fatality as PAF enlisted personnel Norberto Gonzales and the injured, his younger brother Cris.

Initial investigation showed that Ranoman had an altercation with a certain PO1 Jihad Ibrahim that led to the shooting.

Charlie C. Delmas, Inquirer Mindanao

Supreme Court of the Philippines
Judicial and Bar Council
Manila

The JBC announces that the following are applicants for different judgeship positions:

REGIONAL TRIAL COURT (RTC): (REGION X) SINGCOG CITY, MISAMIS ORIENTAL: (Br.43) AGUILAR, Samson A.; BORJA, Gregorio G.; MACABAYA, Bonifacio M.; NUSHI, Oscar P.; PADERANGA, Gail P.; UNDALOK, Mindanao A.; DINAGAT ISLAND, SURIGAO DEL NORTE: (Br.32) AGUSTIN, Rex Lawrence D.; CADAG, Oscar T.; HERNANDEZ, Melissa S.; (REGION XII) MARAWI CITY, LANAO DEL SUR: (Br.19) SUALING, Antonio M.; LANTO, Benjamin B.; MASORONG, Edgar A.; MOSKIM, Mendoza A.; PAPANDAYAN, Rhonda M.; SALACOP, Kimal M.; SARIP, Tago R.; RABAGAN, NORTH COTABATO: (Br.23) ALIXTE, Laureano T.; DELACO, Henry M.; LAMPASA, Diomi T.; NABANG, Francisco G.P.; REYES, Jordan R.

MUNICIPAL TRIAL COURT IN CITIES (MTCC): (REGION IV) LUCENA CITY, QUEZON: (Br.1) DAMIAN, Noel Daniel C.; DEVERA, Dennis O.; LIM, Jocelyn T.; NAVARRO, Maria Chona P.; SAMSON, Robert Nonoy B.

MUNICIPAL TRIAL COURT (MTC): (REGION III) BACOOR, CAVITE: ALCALA, Carlo Martin R.; BALITAAN, Noemi J.; DAMIAN, Noel Daniel C.; DAVID, Aileen Liza M.; DELLOVA, Lamberto B.; DIMAYACYAC, Erwin Y.; GALICIA, Rowena M.; HILARIO, Mary Catherine P.; LAGASCA, Melvyn R.; LAZO, Joanne H.; MUÑOZ, Josefina F.; ORO, Lolani B.; OSORIO, Vicente Marcelo S.; TOLENTINO, Ma. Juanita C.; VILLAR, Bernardo C.; (REGION IX) TANDAG, SURIGAO DEL SUR: ALIZA, Limuel L.; BALANSAG, Edgar G.; BALBUENA, Peter Jr. C.; DE LA CRUZ, Rona M.; NARAGAS, Rufo U.

MUNICIPAL CIRCUIT TRIAL COURT (MCTC): (REGION X) SAN FRANCISCO-BUNAWAN-ROSARIO, AGUSAN DEL SUR: DANA, Santiago H.; LABINDAO, Dorotina G.; SALACOP, Kimal M.; (REGION XI) COMPOSTELA-NEW BATAAN, COMPOSTELA VALLEY: MACASA, Conrado D.; MADRAZO, Leo T.; VILLANUEVA, Ferdinand R.; VILLEGAS, Jesse S.; TAGO-SAN MIGUEL, SURIGAO DEL SUR: ALIZA, Limuel L.; BALBUENA, Peter Jr. C.; BALURAN, Porferio Jr. N.

The public may submit sworn complaint, written report, or opposition against any of the aforesaid applicants **not later than 26 JANUARY 2009 (Monday)** to the JBC Secretariat, 2nd Flr. Centennial Bldg., Supreme Court, Padre Faura St., Manila (Tel. Nos. 552-9512, Fax No. 552-9507; e-mail address http://jbc.judiciary.gov.ph).

All applicants for judicial positions must submit to the JBC ASAP via fax, mail or e-mail their updated JBC Form 1 (Revised September 2007) proof of Filipino citizenship, and 2009 Ombudsman, NBI and Police Clearances, as well as the other requirements before the date scheduled for interview. **Those who fail to submit the necessary requirements shall neither be interviewed nor considered for nomination.**

14 January 2009

MA. LUISA D. VILLARAMA
Clerk of Court &
Ex Officio Secretary

INQUIRER Southern Luzon

John Joe Barcelonel
Bureau Chief Florelen C. Sobrevinas

'Lapay' soars in Masbate City

By Jesse Cubilen Sobrevinas
Masbate City

LIVING BESIDE THE MASBATE Bay all his life, 45-year-old Amerigo Barcelonais has been dancing the "lapay" since learning it from his mother, who like him and the rest of the villagers of Buntigue in Masbate City have been captivated by the graceful movements of the lapay bird.

The dance imitates the behavior of the lapay, a heron that feeds on Buntigue's waterfront. For many years, flocks of herons flying above the village have been a common sight, and women waiting for their fishing husbands have had the chance to observe the birds and imitate them.

Barcelonais's mother, Irene Tapia, who is now in her 70s, was among the first women in the village who learned the movements of the birds into the steps of the lapay. She was eventually honored and recognized as a living treasure for the performing art.

Buntigue

Another dance came to be known as "buntigue" after the village from where it was first performed.

Roberto Gubaldo, 50, former chair of Buntigue, said the performance was in honor of the generation, Salut Philippines, a martyr who, according to devotees, had a gift of healing.

"There was this story of a mother who promised to dance for Saint Philippine if her son, who was afflicted by a mysterious disease, would be healed," Gubaldo said. The son recovered, reportedly after seeing one of the saint touched his body, he added.

Most of the supposed miracle spread, and since then, people hoping to be cured of their sicknesses, have flocked to the village at the mouth of the bay to dance for the performers.

Dance steps

The buntigue is danced to a tune similar to that of "Magkaisa ay Til Ako," a Tagalog folk song translated as "Planting Rice" in English—a plea for good harvest and healing from Saint Philippine and an expression of gratitude to the patroness for bountiful fishing.

Dancers sway their arms, bend to the ground, and look upward to the sky, mimicking the bird's eye and motions in flight.

National Artist Ramon E. Obusan reviewed the uniqueness and ingenuity of the lapay and the buntigue while researching native dances in the country, according to Esperanza Donao-Carullo, designated city tourism officer.

AMERIGO Barcelonais, a resident of Barangay Buntigue in Masbate City, performs the "lapay" folk dance, imitating the behavior of a "lapay" bird. JESSE CUBILEN SOBREVINAS

She said it was Obusan who combined the movements of the two dances into the lapay-buntigue.

That blend was formally introduced as one of the original folk dances in the country during the National Folk Dance Workshop at the Cultural Center of the Philippines and Folk Arts Theater in 1997. It was launched during the first Lapay-Buntigue Festival on the second anniversary of the cityhood of Masbate in September 2000.

'Lapay-buntigue' dance is inspired by movements of flocks of herons in Masbate Bay

Distinction

Soon, the dance-buntigue emerged as a culturally distinct art of the city. "Just in time when we need to establish a festival that will be unique to our city," said Donao-Carullo.

Over the years, Masbate city and provincial tours have known for Rodeo Masbatena, a festival celebrating the life and exploits of cattle rustlers. "But Rodeo Masbatena is attributed to the province at large. Masbate City is just one of places in the province where there are cattle rustlers. City folk wanted something that would be exclusively identified with our city," the tourism officer said.

Since its launching, the lapay-buntigue has raised the people's cultural awareness, according to Jose Cookie Medroso, chairman of the provincial and city tourism councils.

Status symbol

"To be one of the performers of the lapay-buntigue is regional and national competition but becomes a status symbol for the people of Masbate City," he said, adding that graduate every year eager to let their children join celebration.

"Masbate City is taking many of its cultural trademarks, good thing we have the lapay-buntigue. That is why the city govern. must has been promoting the dance," he added.

Donao-Carullo said the dancers had to their own top colors or received clothes to their first years of joining street dancing competitions, including those of the Sinyo Bikol and the Hinilog Festival in Cebu City.

Lapay birds still fly over and feed in the waterfront of Buntigue. And the villagers will perform for chance as a form of offering to Saint Philippine.

After being laid-off in Taiwan, OFW back for job hunt

By Karen Lapitan
Calamba, Laguna

ANNA ROSELLE ARIANO went home from Taiwan in December last year not to spend her Christmas vacation but to look for a job.

In her first year as an OFW (overseas Filipino worker), Ariano, 23, worked as a technical assistant in Advanced Chip Engineering Technologies Inc. (Aceti), a producer of wafer chips, in Hsinchu, Taiwan, in March 2007, hoping to bring some wealth and comfort to her family.

She had thought that she would be earning three times the local wage rates, but things did not happen as she had hoped. She was laid-off in November; still she remained optimistic that she could find another job abroad.

Ariano's pay slip reflected a salary of NT25,000 (P34,000) but half of that went to medical insurance, tax, agency and boarder's fee.

"We found out pay slip strange. Too many items were unanswered. Our initial pay slips were written in English so we readily understood the particulars, but they suddenly changed it to Mandarin," she related.

She said she and the other employees tried to complain to their employment agency, but nothing came out of it.

Despite the relatively low salary, she persisted in working as it is not in her just received to help her parents send her three siblings to school.

"My mother is earning through our wood store, while my father is unemployed. I want to give them a better life, just like ordinary children who want to enjoy their parents. Only my twin sister and I were working as I hoped to stay longer in Taiwan," Ariano said.

Ordinary employees in Taiwan are collecting up to NT40,000 (P53,000), she said.

Austerity

During the last quarter of 2008, Aceti started imposing austerity measures. It reduced electricity costs even at the expense of production. "We could not even use a cleaning fluid needed in the production," Ariano said.

Workers were found in the lavers to lower production costs. "The company eventually requested us to go back to the normal hours from work. Since there was a no-work-no-pay policy, we had very little salaries in our last few months," Ariano related.

She said there was a time when the workers had to file two work hours since the company declared no work during the period. Only a few Taiwanese were allowed to work.

"It was unfortunate that I had to pay our dorm and other expenses. The agency's fees and other items were still deducted from our pay. What we had was basically too little for us to save there," she said.

On Dec. 2, Ariano and her co-workers were called to a meeting by their employment agency. "We were asked about our plans. It was either we stayed or not," she said.

More retrenchment

Having an assurance of work and running out of her savings, Ariano decided to go back to the Philippines. Three more OFWs decided to fly home to seek other opportunities—locally or abroad.

"Our agency told us that many companies in Taiwan were laying-off, so we decided to look for some other opportunities somewhere," Ariano said.

Migrante International, a nongovernment organization supporting Filipino migrant workers, reported that as of November 2008, 7,219 workers were laid-off by Taiwan alone and the figure continued to escalate as more companies affect shut down or laid off employees.

Ariano had not yet fully paid her placement fee when she flew to Taiwan in 2007. She was only able to pay half of the P95,000 placement fee.

She admitted that she was not able to invest on a single property from her savings in Taiwan. She said her salary would go to the basic needs of her family.

"I am looking for an employment opportunity abroad that could give me a good pay. Despite the financial crisis, I have to continue looking for work," she said. "After all, it's for my family."

ARIANO: While an assessment of work and her savings dwindling, she returned to the Philippines to look for another job. CHRISTIAN ALEJO

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Toyota, Pharex dispute fourth quarterfinal slot

By Cedelf F. Tejada

ADAPTING A PLAYOFF-LIKE mood has done wonders for the once-slumping Pharex Generals, but to the ultimate-test round of the PBL PCCI First Conference Cup.

Rolling on a three-game streak after a miserable 1-7 start, the Generals need to get over the hump one more time against Toyota Otis today in a stepladder knockout for the last quarterfinal berth at the Emilio Aguinaldo College Gym in Manila.

The Generals have the momentum, but the Sports Otis team is capable of outwilling that one to the bitter end.

"We've been in playoff mode because every game has been crucial," Pharex coach Carlo Tan said Tuesday, after his team fired to fight another day with a 96-77 win over Bacolod.

It seems, Toyota's depth is the least of their worries.

"I don't know how much gas we have left," he said. "If we win we're out, if we lose, we're out."

"That is our lot so," said Toyota Otis coach Ariel Vanguardia.

Previous champion Hapee Toothpaste also creeps up to elimination-round campaign against Magnolia Two-Quench.

The 2 p.m. duel moves over to the Complete Protection then the Batang Pier once a victory will give them the twice-to-beat advantage in the quarterfinal round.

But the Batang Pier, led by Sunshine Dy, moved to ease the countdown entering now.

"We want to take that one-step mentality to the semifinals," said Hapee Toothpaste coach Jorge Gallent.

Ole coach Robert Manalo grandin.

Purefoam champion Hotbong Coolers also creeps up to elimination-round campaign against Magnolia Two-Quench.

The 2 p.m. duel moves over to the Complete Protection then the Batang Pier once a victory will give them the twice-to-best

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
THURSDAY, JANUARY 15, 2009
SPORTS

HELMET Christine of Sta. Lucia Realty goes up a storm over the defense of Alaska big man Joe Devance.

Well-rested Alaska rips SLR; TNT routs San Mig

By Marc Anthony R. Cuadra

ALASKA COACH TIM COONE SAID WINning Game 1 was the easiest step to take in his return semifinal confrontation with defending champion Sta. Lucia.

"We'll need to see how we bounce back for Game 2," Coone declared last night after his team broke away in the fourth period to pound out a 92-76 victory over the Realtors to draw first blood in their best-of-seven PBA Philippine Cup Final Four series.

"We have a long memory," Coone added, recalling how the semi-upset of last year's series was over their way before they eventually lost, 3-1. "We know we want Game 1 (last year) kind of away and then lose Games 2 and 3."

Joe Devance served 17 points, Willie Miller added 14 while Jeffrey Cariaso shot six of his eight in the fourth quarter to fuel the Alaska breakaway in the final nine minutes.

In the second game, Talk N' Text routed San Miguel, 120-106, to also take a 1-0 lead in their semifinal series.

The scores

Final Game

ALASKA (92)—Devance 17, Miller 14, Yeo 12, Unuigbe 10, Cruz 10, Eric Dela Cruz 10, Cariaso 6, Fajardo 5, Custodio 1, Lanete 4, Reavis 0.

STA. LUCIA (76)—Williams 18, Ilo 14, Reyes 10, Miranda 8, Cortez 7, Canaleta 6, Asoro 4, Dela Cruz 3, Ibanez 2, Gallo 0.

Quarterscores: 18-16, 33-31, 57-51, 92-76

Second Game

TALK N' TEXT (120)—Wilson 29, Cardona 21, Ulboog 20, Castro 17, De Ocampo 9, Yu 8, De Ocampo Jr. 10, Sangalang 6, Hall 7, Olivaria 3, Espinal 2, Pinto 0, Lao 0.

SAN MIGUEL (106)—Rodriguez 32, Reed 16, Pingris 11, Seigle 10, Ambrosio 8, Custodio 5, Villanueva 5, Custodio 4, Aguilar 4, Tiongson 2, Ong 0, Ilad 0, Rivera 0.

Quarters: 30-18, 61-52, 93-82, 120-106

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Peping pursues comprehensive law for sports

By Jaro Navarro

JUST AS HE PROMISED AFTER GETting a fresh mandate, Olympic chief Peping Cojuangco has put the creation of a comprehensive law for sports on top of his list of priorities.

The president of the Philippine Olympic Committee said he would start off the campaign by consolidating all laws governing sports by seeking some changes on Republic Act 6847, the eleven-year-old creation of the Philippine Sports Commission.

Lobbying for the support of the House of Representatives, Cojuangco wants to improve the relationship of the PSC with the POC and the national sports associations under its wings.

Cojuangco said he would ask lawmakers to grant the NSAs an annual budget from the national coffers based on the programs they would submit to Congress.

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DID YOU KNOW

SEA, MGSA in Manila got its name from an organization formed by the original owners of the land. The board of directors of La Hermandad de la Santa Misericordia was more commonly known as La Santa Misa.

Cyril, Bandonill, Inquirer Research

Cops to test customers of Metro bars for drugs

PNP chief says move part of antidrug drive

By Marlon Ramos and Nancy C. Carvajal

IN LINE WITH EFFORTS TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM OF ILLEGAL drugs, Philippine National Police Director General Jesus Verzosa yesterday said he has ordered his men to conduct random drug tests on clients of bars and similar establishments in Metro Manila.

"As part of the antidrug campaign, we want to deploy [antidrug] agents to business establishments, especially high-end bars, and instruct those who choose to feel under the influence of illegal drugs so far [as] recklessly subjected to a drug test," he told reporters.

Verzosa was in Quezon City to attend the groundbreaking ceremony for a new police and fire station which will be built on E. Rodriguez Avenue, Barangay Bagumbayan in Quezon City.

The PNP chief, however, admitted that his directive might pose a problem to his men who could end up being accused of violating the rights of customers of the targeted establishments.

"What we can do is get the approval of the person concerned to undergo a drug test so we would not be accused of infringement of human rights," Verzosa said.

He added that the plan would also require the full cooperation of the owners of business establishments in Metro Manila.

"Owners should allow policemen inside their premises and besides, if their clients have nothing to hide, they would not refuse to [undergo] a drug test," Verzosa said.

Quezon City Vice Mayor Herbert Bautista, chair of the city's antidrug council who was also at the groundbreaking ceremony, expressed his support for the PNP chief's plan to conduct random drug tests in various entertainment establishments in the city.

"Drug testing is provided for in the Dangerous Drugs Act as long as the person concerned will agree [in the procedure]," Bautista said.

Verzosa made the announcement as the top police official in Metro Manila said several bars and clubs frequented by young people have become drug "hot spots."

Citing information from the Regional Anti-Illegal Drug Special Operations Task Group, National Capital Region Police Office Director Leopoldo Bataoil said several entertainment establishments in Makati, Taguig and Quezon City have been identified as places where there was rampant selling of illegal drugs.

This has been confirmed by the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency, according to Bataoil.

"Drug pushers have made these bars their hangouts and venues for peddling illegal substances such as cocaine, methamphetamine and ecstasy," he told the reporters.

"Students and other teenagers are their primary victims," Bataoil said.

However, he declined to name the establishments, saying they were closely coordinating with PDEA agents to "conclusively [allegate]" such club owners and operators.

Asked if the intelligence in Taguig was included in their watchlist, he said, "Yes. I think the PDEA also confirmed it."

The management of the bar, however, can be alerted that illegal drugs were being sold or sold within the establishment.

The intensified campaign of the police against illegal drugs was prompted by the controversy surrounding the "Alabang Boys," three men who were arrested in drug busts in Alabang and Cubao, Quezon City. According to PDEA, the three supplied drugs and other illegal substances to customers of popular night spots in Metro Manila.

Bataoil, meanwhile, said that only 300 of 1,057 barangays in the metropolis have yet to be cleared of drugs.

According to him, records of the NCR-PO's Regional Anti-Illegal Drug Special Operations Task Group showed that 1,057 barangays were once drug-free.

To clear the remaining villages of the drug menace, he urged police officials to "reach out to the community and educate the people on the ill-effects of drugs by conducting lectures in schools and barangay sectors," he said in a statement.

Bataoil also asked local executives to support their campaign "to totally eliminate the demand for illegal drugs."

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THE BEST FROM THE SOUTH
Dancers from Mindanao perform at the opening of an exhibit in Intramuros, Manila, featuring products from Region I2 and the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

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Mind where you throw that gum, Fernando tells U-Belt students

By Allison W. Lopez

KEEP THE RIBBON YOUR POCKET, PLEASE.

The Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) yesterday urged students at the University Belt in Manila to help the agency keep the area clean by disposing of their trash—which includes bubble gum—properly.

According to MMDA Chair Bayani Fernando, they were intensifying their cleanup efforts to transform the U-Belt into a "Smoothest City" in the coming months.

"Huwag nga pong bubble gum na nakadikit sa desk, pader at pader ay aming tanalo (We even scrape the bits of bubble gum we find on the desks, [on the] walls)," Fernando said.

There are 19 universities and colleges in the area.

Last week, he rallied to officials of Arellano University in Legarda about how they could solve the problem of illegal vendors and informal settlers in the area.

MMDA General Manager Robert Nacianceno said they have installed new streetlights in the U-Belt while continuing their campaign to clear all streets and sidewalks of obstructions.

Fernando said the physical revamp of the area, which includes the repainting of pedestrians and sidewalks, would make students feel safer about their surroundings.

"This is beneficial to the students, they will have a sense of belonging. When they go home to their provinces, they will have something to be proud of to their parents and friends," he added.

Fernando said the schools have responded positively to the agency's efforts in sprucing up the U-Belt although he stressed that as stakeholders, the universities must also get involved in the MMDA's campaign.

Delfin de la Paz started the fight

I SENT ONE OF MY STAFF HERE... known as "Inombong ang kay Tatlo," Alle Servizo, Tuesday to the Valley Golf and Country Club to investigate discreetly the much-publicized brawl in the golf course.

Alle did a very good job of shooting, disguising herself as a secretary to a rich boss who supposedly ordered to be a member.

There was no way Alle could have gathered information I asked her to collate as a media person since the management has ordered all employees not to talk to the media.

From her talks with waiters, umbrella girls, grass cutters and caddies, here's what Alle gathered: Delfin de la Paz, 56, deserved to be beaten up and expelled from Valley Golf.

De la Paz, according to the employees, started the fight when he slapped Mayor Nanette Daygubatan Jr. of Manila, Lanao del Sur, with an undersized 3-iron backhoe.

Daygubatan was took it as an insult and a heated argument ensued.

It's true the Daygubatans overtook the De la Paws on one hole, but they had asked for permission from 15-year-old Bino, one of the club's umbrella girls said.

The De la Paws, the soldier's girl said, were taking too long on a hole that the Pangats durians were waiting to use after the De la Paws.

But the elder De la Paz apparently didn't know Bino gave the permission and confronted the Daygubatans.

"Daygubatan kami sa income mo [I asked for permission from your companion]," Daygubatan Jr. told De la Paz, referring to Bino.

"Kontra ako dito [Even when, then what]?" the elder De la Paz asked Daygubatan, shouting.

Other golfers and employees pacified the two.

The quarrel didn't end as the course even after the parties had been pacified.

In the Valley Golf dining area, the elder De la Paz again confronted Mayor Daygubatan over the incident in the course.

A second altercation took place.

The employees then Alle interviewed couldn't say who dealt the first blow, but they said De la Paz cracked blows with Mayor Daygubatan and his brother Hussein.

A earlier reported with many people, including other golfers, trying to break up the fight.

The bodyguards of the Daygubatans, according to the employees, didn't take part in the assault.

"Kasama sa mga sessions yung mga security nina Daygubatan [The bodyguards took part in pacifying]," said a waiter.

The employees could not tell who hit Bino, who was bloodied on the right eye.

She then witnessed the Daygubatan bodyguards leave took part in attacking the De la Paws.

The bleeding names four a De la Paz, eight neighbor-in-golfe pang multipag-away (De la Paz was arrogant, everything had been settled but he still looked for a fight)," said another waiter.

All the employees Alle talked with were one in saying De la Paz deserved to be expelled for starting the fight.

"Dapat lang sa kanya yon, mayabang siya [He deserved to be expelled because he was arrogant]," said a caddy.

A waiter who took part in the conversation with Alle at the restaurant nodded his head in approval.

Most of the employees who talked with Alle had nothing good to say about the elder De la Paz, one describing him as "mas sipsip" [sycophant], and another as "mukhang aso" [bad-looking].

I have no reason to doubt Alle, who's been with me two years after she obtained her bachelor of arts in Creative Writing from the University of the Philippines (UP) in 1995.

From what Alle told me, I apologize to the Daygubatans. Appreciate Bolivar, Secretary Hunter Sr. in particular...for me exercising maximum patience with the fun-headed De la Paz.

Bus on Edsa-Magallanes catches fire, alarms MRT passengers

By Marlon Ramos

FLAMES DEEPPED HUNDREDS OF centimeters of the Metro Rail Transit (MRT) after a bus caught fire near the overhead train station Magallanes station in Makati City at rush hour yesterday morning.

The incident which occurred at around 9:30 a.m. stalled traffic on the northbound portion of Edsa as Metropolitan Manila Development Authority traffic enforcers temporarily closed two lanes of the thoroughfare to all vehicles.

"What I saw scared me. I thought it was a terrorist attack," said bank teller Norman Fuentes, who added that he would just take a taxicab instead of getting on the MRT.

"I will just just up with the traffic and pay an extra P150 for my taxi fare rather than risk my life," he told the reporters as he got into a cab.

Security guards of the MRT Magallanes station said the fire which gutted the Surallenes-bound Admiral Transport bus (TWD 277 with body number 8005) did not affect the light rail's operations although they admitted that the incident alarmed some passengers.

"We just told the passengers that the fire was not intentional and was too far away to pose any danger," one of the guards said.

The driver of the Admiral Transport bus, Mauricio Muñoz, 38, said that he had just stopped at the loading bay when he noticed smoke coming out of the front of the bus.

Ordered passengers out

He added he frantically ordered passengers to get out of the vehicle.

"Hinarot nalang nagpalabas ng bus sa kanan at wa ga giff. The fire then quickly spread to other parts of the bus," Muñoz told the reporters.

Volunteer firemen quickly put out the blaze some 20 minutes later. Firefighters from Bonifacio Village also rushed to the scene and the incident occurred just 200 meters away from the Edsa gate of the upscale subdivision.

Muñoz said the fire could have been caused by faulty electrical wiring in the vehicle's engine.

Traffic on Edsa reversed to normal soon after as hour later after MMDA personnel towed the bus away from the area.

METROBRIEFS

Appeal to ban cigarette vendors lauded

MANILA Mayor Alfredo Lim yesterday vowed to act on the appeal of tobacco control advocates to ban ambulant cigarette vendors in the city, particularly in areas frequented by the youth. Lim, who described the proposal of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control Alliance Philippines (FCAP) as "laudable," said he is willing to take up the matter with the City Council. "I think their proposal is good. The city government of Manila has always been supportive of the antismoking ban. We will see how we could be able to support them in their advocacy. Maybe we could take this up with the City Council," said Lim. He admitted that many Manileños were not informed said he is hopeful that by removing cigarette vendors from the streets, a lot of residents would be able to kick the habit. Tina C. Santos

Speeding van hits bike, kills girl

A 17-YEAR-OLD girl was killed while her two siblings were injured when the bicycle they were riding on was accidentally hit by a speeding multicab truck Tuesday afternoon in Tondo, Manila. Irene Garcia, of Gate 41, Parola Compound, was declared dead on arrival at the Jose Reyes Memorial Medical Center due to severe head and body injuries. Her brother Sonny, 11, and sister Rosemarie, 8, meanwhile, remain under observation at the same hospital. The driver of the truck, Pepe Gambino, 53, employee of Tri C Trucking and resident of Sta. Ana Pasay, voluntarily surrendered to authorities after the accident. SPO2 Sergio Macaraeg, of the Manila Bureau of Traffic Management, said the incident happened at 1:20 p.m. on the access road of the Manila International Container Terminal (MICT) compound in Tondo. Investigators showed that the truck overtook the bicycle but as it was swerving back into the lane, its rear end hit the bike being driven by Irene. Charges of reckless imprudence resulting in homicide and serious physical injuries were filed against Gambino. Tina C. Santos

Ban on plastic 'bunderitas' proposed

ENVIRONMENT advocates yesterday urged local government and church officials to consider imposing a ban on disposable plastic bunderitas, saying these have become an environmental nuisance. The EcoWaste Coalition, a waste and pollution watchdog, was particularly referring to the color-fat beverage or "bunderitas" being the vessels of foods in Manila and other communities that will mark the feast of Sto. Niño this weekend. "The use of disposable beverage such as those made of plastic bags, product adsorbents and packaging scraps in drums is a sorry lack of consciousness regarding the adverse impact of these single use items to the environment," said Aileen Lucero, EcoWaste Coalition national. Mariv Caloocio, EcoWaste Coalition president. He added that the bunderitas pose real environmental and climate burdens as these add to the tons of post-fiesta discards that are usually disposed of through ecologically harmful practices such as dumping and burning. "If fiesta organizers were really keen in putting up bunderitas, they should use environment-friendly materials such as those that can be washed, stored and reused such as reusable bunderitas from fabric scraps. Tina C. Santos

Beer joint manager shot dead

A MANAGER of a beer joint was allegedly robbed and shot dead by two men, including his subordinate, Tuesday after noon in Sta. Cruz, Manila. The victim was identified as Bernard Alino, 50, officer-in-charge and stay-in manager of Cyber Diner Disco and KTV located on Rizal Avenue, Sta. Cruz. Michael Villa, 29, the floor manager, was arrested during a follow-up operation. Villa's alleged cohort, identified only as Ureban Bulsar, is now the subject of a manhunt. Police said the victim was working inside his office when he was ambushed by Cuenyo Misna, 29, when the two suspects suddenly barged inside. Gideon shot Alino but three rounds had left his daughter unharmed. Before fleeing, the suspects also took the victim's P1,000. Tina C. Santos

Rogue investor caught after trying to fake death

HARPERSVILLE, ALABAMA—With his world crumbling around him, investment adviser Shimon Schlenker opted for a bailout. However, his plot-to-escape personal turmoil was short-lived.

In a true reminiscence of a James Bond movie, the 39-year-old businessman and amateur daredevil pilot apparently tried to fake his death in a plane crash, secretly parachuting to the ground and speeding away on a motorcycle he had stashed away in the pine barrens of central Alabama.

But the engineering clever-day bigs came to an end when authorities finally caught up to Schlenker at a North Florida campground where he had apparently tried to take his own life, according to Alabama-based US Marshals spokesperson Michael Richards.

Schlenker was taken into custody around 0300 GMT on Wednesday after officers from the US Marshal's office in Tallahassee, Florida, found him inside a tent at a campground in nearby Quincy, Richards said.

"He had cut one of his wrists, but he is still alive," Richards said.

The roaring pilot was tracked down after investigators developed leads that he might be in Florida and forwarded them to the US Marshals officers there.

Schlenker was on the run not only from the law but from divorce, a stern investigation of his businesses and angry investors who accuse him of swindling potentially millions in savings they entrusted to him.

"We've learned over time that he's a pathological liar—you don't believe a single word that comes out of his mouth," said Charles Kinsey, a 49-year-old airline pilot from Atlanta who alleges Schlenker pocketed at least $120,000 of his parents' retirement fund.

The events of the past few days appeared to be a last, desperate gamble by a man who had fallen from great heights and was about to hit bottom.

On Sunday—two days after buying his beloved stepfather and suffering a $500,000 loss in federal court the same day—Schlenker was flying his single-engine Piper Malibu to Florida from his Indiana home where he realized from GIS sensors that he was in trouble. He told the air control tower the windshield had imploded, and that his face was plastered with blood. Then his radio went silent.

Military jets tried to intercept the plane and found the door open, the cockpit dark. The pilots followed until the aircraft crashed in a Florida Panhandle bayou, surrounded by bamboo. There was no sign of Schlenker's body. They now know they should never have expected to find one.

More than 300 lawsuits in the north, at a convenience store in Oklahoma, Alabama, police picked up a man using Schlenker's Indiana driver's license and carrying a pair of what appeared to be pilot's goggles. The man, who was not from the issues done, told the officers he'd been in a canoe accident.

After officers gave him a lift to a nearby motel, Schlenker apparently made his way to a storage unit he had rented just the day before his flight. He climbed aboard a red racing motorcycle with full saddlebags, and sped off into the countryside. AP

Bush says he, Laura likely lost money in financial crisis also

WASHINGTON—PRESIDENT George W. Bush on Tuesday said that he and first lady Laura Bush had most likely lost money in the economic crisis, but added they wouldn't find out how much until after he left office.

In an interview with CNN's Larry King, Bush said his personal assets were in a blind trust and that the last time he talked with the trustees was eight years ago. Bush said he had "no earthly idea" how much he and his wife had lost in the market slump but said he was confident that they had lost some.

Asked what part of the responsibility for the financial meltdown rests on his shoulders, Bush defended his decision to ask Congress to approve a $700-billion financial rescue plan. He said his actions had mitigated the effects the economic crisis is having on Americans.

Bush also argued that his administration called for reform of mortgage giants Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, but that no legislative reform was ever passed.

"Nor to blow my own horn, but I recognized the dangers inherent with Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac and asked Congress to regulate them," Bush said, adding that he was worried the new

GEORGE and Laura Bush

arrangement embodies used an arcane sequence announced to voters and said he was "comfortable" with the methods used because they were based on legal opinions.

While he said the US-led invasion in Iraq was the right decision, Bush acknowledged being "worried Iraq was going to fail" at the time he decided to dispatch 20,000 more US troops there in 2007.

Bush was asked if Hurricane Katrina was the lowest point of his presidency.

"Well, I think being called a racist was the low point," Bush replied, referring to assertion to the federal government's sluggish response to the needs of hurricane victims, many of whom were black.

Asked if he thought he had gotten a bum rap as president, Laura Bush chimed in, saying that she thought he had. "A lot of it was very personal and demeaning," she said.

The president, however, brushed off the criticism, saying he couldn't and didn't make decisions based on polls.

On other issues, the president said he was a little surprised that his brother, Jeb, decided not to run for a Senate seat in Florida. AP

US gov't presses jail for Madoff

NEW YORK—PROsecutors asked a federal judge on Tuesday to jail besieged financier Bernard Madoff, saying he tried to pick "winners and losers" in his $50-billion fraud when he and his wife shipped more than $1 million in jewelry to relatives and friends over the holidays.

Assistant US Attorney Marc Litt said in a letter to US District Judge Lawrence M. McKenna that there were no conditions of bail that will ensure the 70-year-old former Nasdaq chair was not a danger to the community and a risk to flee.

"No matter its has sincere determined by the sentencing court, it appears that defendant will not be able to ensure evidently close to leaving the sincerest necessary to make his victims whole," Litt wrote. "Accordingly, every possible penny of the defendant's assets must be prevented from dissipation." AP

The WORLD

Editor Lawrence K. Quesa

Israel pounds Gaza; rockets strike from Lebanon

GAZA CITY, GAZA STRIP—ISRAELI AIRCRAFT struck a Gaza City cemetery on Wednesday, pulverizing newly buried bodies. Warplanes also pounded militants' weapons positions and arms smuggling tunnels, as guerrillas in Lebanon raised the specter of a new front by sending rockets crashing into northern Israel.

Israeli police said three rockets were fired from Lebanon in open areas near the town of Kiryat Shemona, causing no injuries or damage. Residents were instructed to stay close to bomb shelters and safe rooms following the second attack from Lebanon in less than a week.

On Wednesday, UN chief Ban Ki-moon met with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Cairo in an effort to secure a diplomatic end to the violence, which began 19 days ago. Israel's onslaught against Gaza's Islamic Hamas rulers has killed more than 940 Palestinians, half of them civilians, according to Palestinian hospital officials. The toll included four Palestinians, including at least two militants, killed in overnight fighting, hospital officials said.

Thirteen Israelis have also been killed since the offensive began, four of them by rocket fire from Gaza.

Eight years of Palestinian rocket attacks on southern Israeli towns sparked the war, which began with a devastating Israeli air offensive and then expanded to include a ground campaign.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the rocket fire from Lebanon on Wednesday. Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed guerrilla group that fought a months-long war with Israel in 2006, denied involvement in last week's attack and speculation focused on small Palestinian groups in Lebanon.

Lebanese security officials said the Israeli Army fired shells on south Lebanon in response. The Israeli military said it recovered five in the source of fire, and that is regarded the Lebanese government and military as responsible for preventing attacks on Israel.

The rockets flying across its northern border have fueled Israel's fears that militants in Lebanon could try to open a second front in solidarity with Gaza's Islamic militant Hamas rulers.

In Gaza, Israeli warplanes and helicopter gunships pounded 60 targets overnight, including a police station in Gaza City, rocket-launching sites, gunmen, weapons-production and storage facilities and about 35 weapons smuggling tunnels, the military said. Witnesses in southern Gaza reported an air strike on the house of a senior squad leader.

Security sites struck the Sheikh Radwan cemetery in Gaza City, destroying about 20 graves—some just recently dug—and scattering bits of flesh and body parts for yards (meters), residents said.

The military had no immediate comment, but rocket squads have used graveyards as launching pads in the past.

"There was flesh on the roofs, there were small bits of internees. My neighbor found a hand of a woman who died a long time ago, we put it all into a plastic bag," said resident Ahmad Abu Jarbou. As he left his house to see what had happened, he noticed Ahmad's body was missing one bit of flesh, he added.

"The biggest thing we found was a hand," Abu Jarbou said. "One man who buried his cousin yesterday couldn't find the body at all." AP

Gazans seek new places to bury their dead

PALESTINIAN Salim Sarhi and his relatives bury their cousin Kamel, 22, who was killed in an Israeli air strike on Tuesday, over the body of Kamel's brother Mujtahed, who was killed in an Israeli air strike last May, at Sheik Radwan cemetery in Gaza City. AP

GAZA CITY, GAZA STRIP—ONE family buried a slain son over his grandfather. Another handed up the tiny bodies of three young cousins and lowered them into the grave of a long-dead aunt. A man was laid to rest with his brother.

More than two weeks into the Israeli offensive that has killed more than 940 Palestinians, Gazans are struggling to find places to bury their dead. Cemeteries throughout Gaza City that were closed for new burials have now reopened.

"Gaza is all a graveyard," gravedigger Sabeen Omar said on Tuesday as he shoveled earth in Gaza City's crammed Sheik Radwan cemetery, a cigarette dangling from his lips.

Just 1.6 kilometers wide and 40 km long, Gaza has always suffered from a shortage of burial space. But Gazans say Israel's shelling and general relentless bombardment have made it impossible for residents to mark Sharyan Cemetery—the only graveyard in the area with space to dig fresh graves.

Palestinian medical officials say roughly half the dead are civilians.

Among them are the forensic cousins, 3-month-old Mohammed, 2-year-old Mostafa and 3-year-old Ahmed, who were fatally shot early on the day the grave of an aunt to lay them to rest last week. AP

Obama urged to focus on human rights

WASHINGTON—PRESIDENT-elect Barack Obama should put human rights at the center of US foreign, economic and security policy to undo "the enormous damage" of the Bush years, a leading research and advocacy group said on Wednesday in its survey of conditions in more than 90 countries.

In a 564-page report, Human Rights Watch said the Bush administration largely withdrew from the defense of human rights after deciding to combat terrorism "without regard to basic rights or see to be subjected to torture, enforced disappearance or detention without trial."

"As a vital first step, Barack Obama and his team should unfurly the banner they flew during the campaign," said Kenneth Roth, the executive director of the group, a worldwide organization promoting human rights and civil liberties.

Roth said the Bush administration arrogantly abandoned effective diplomatic efforts to reverse abuses.

"It's not only wrong but tolerated to commit abuses in the name of fighting terrorism or to pursue abuses by repressive governments because they are thought to be allies in counter-terrorism," he said.

"The criticism was flatly rejected by state department spokesperson Sean McCormack. 'We take a back seat to no one in our defense of human rights, whether that is helping free people in Iraq and Afghanistan or working to put an end to human traffic or fighting for the right of every individual to worship or be or the wishes," he said. AP

EU poises legal action on Russia, Ukraine

MOSCOW—THE LEADERS OF two gas-starved European nations traveled to Ukraine and Russia on Wednesday pressing them to restart supplies to the European Union threatened by a bitter winter with frigid weather fueling energy deliveries to the middle of a bitter winter.

But Ukraine's natural gas company said for a second straight day it would not send Russian gas along to Europe, citing what it claimed were serious violations set by Russia's gas monopoly Gazprom.

While an end to the politically charged dispute in sight—despite an agreement that sent teams of EU monitors out to pumping stations to keep tabs on the gas flows... the European Union said it'd up.

European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso warned Gazprom and Naftogaz, Ukraine's state-run gas company, that he would recommend the European energy companies sue them unless they moved quickly to restore gas supplies. He insisted that European consumers should not be held hostage to a dispute between energy suppliers.

"If the agreement is not honored, it means that Russia and Ukraine can no longer be considered reliable partners for the European Union in matters of energy supply," Barroso told the European Parliament. AP

WORLDBRIEFS

China criticized for rights record

BEIJING—Human Rights Watch says China has taken promises made to Olympic organizers to improve human rights, with leaders in Beijing instead tightening restrictions on their citizens' freedoms. The prominent independent rights group said in its annual report that China, in the months leading up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics, cracked down on activists and minorities and obstructed the work of civil society organizations. Frustrated, and "with nowhere else to turn, people increasingly are taking to the streets, with tens of thousands of public protests, at times violent, now taking place across China each year," the group said. AP

Rough sailing over tax problems

WASHINGTON—Timothy Geithner, President-elect Barack Obama's pick to head as treasury secretary and fix the economy, will likely face tough questioning at his confirmation hearing after public revelations he failed to pay $34,000 in taxes several years ago. Senate Democrats are pressing to schedule a quick confirmation hearing for Geithner on Friday, hoping to clear up swift questions of his nomination to inaugurate Barack Obama's presidency. But newly released information about the tax goofs by Geithner, regarded as a brilliant financial markets specialist well-positioned to deal with the nation's considerable economic problems, could complicate the process. AP

A breeze for Hillary at hearing

WASHINGTON—Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton smoothly took on pointed questions from the aisle to the senate in a gentle job interview for her top US diplomat but could not dodge tougher questions about whether her husband's charity posed an ethical conflict. Her confirmation as secretary of state is not in doubt, and she could be on the job as soon as President-elect Barack Obama's first full day in office. The Senate foreign relations committee planned to vote on the nomination Thursday. AP

Shark attacks rattle nerves

SYDNEY—A recent string of shark attacks across Australia has rattled swimmers' nerves. But experts say fear not—it's (relatively) safe to go in the water. "This is a mild hysteria," said Rachel Robbins, chief scientist at Australia's Fodney Fox Shark Research Foundation, named for and founded by famed shark expert. "I think it's just a freak coincidence that we've happened to have three shark attacks" in two days. AP

Blagojevich pulls fast one on US Senate

SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS—ON the day since the presidency-elect, US Democratic senators on Capitol Hill and just about every politician in Illinois. On the other side was Gov. Rod Blagojevich, a mired-in defendant and national punchline.

Guess who won?

Blagojevich outlasted everyone who had wanted him out to try to fill the Senate seat he is charged with trying to sell.

Despite the scandal around him, the governor got his way by staring down his opponents with the perfect pick: Roland Burris, a black politician who had an unblemished reputation and big institutional support that he would fight tirelessly for the seat.

Blagojevich also had Illinois law on his side. Moreover, his choice put Democrats in the tricky position of trying to deny entry to the man who would become the chamber's only black member. Blagojevich, who is also charged with trying to shake down Obama, reckons.

"It did take a kind of perfect storm, of a governor who is incapable of having scruples and a politician incapable of shame, to go ahead with it," said Mike Madigan, chair of political science at Illinois University. "That was the last card Blagojevich had to play. At least he got to do something and cheat his ears."

In the end, the Blagojevich-Burris combination proved irresistible.

BLAGOJEVICH: Either he's a real smart or his enemies are real dumb.

he such a distraction that Obama himself tweeted concern and signaled to Senate leaders that they should not Burris. Finally, on Monday, they said they would. Vice President Dick Cheney will swear Burris in Thursday on the Senate floor.

Exactly why Blagojevich appointed someone and what he hoped to accomplish are something of a mystery to some political observers. The Democratic governor still faces federal corruption charges. And he has been impeached and faces a state Senate trial later this month that could get him thrown out of office.

Blagojevich said that he wanted to make sure Illinois had its full representation in the Senate and that lawmakers had failed to set up a special election in 45 days.

If his intent was to irritate his enemies and head them to his will, he succeeded. The Miami Herald ran a cartoon of him playing outside the Capitol dome like a see-saw. From inside the dome, labeled "US Senate Arena," someone cries: "Either he's real smart, or we're real dumb!"

Some political observers speculated initially that Blagojevich picked Burris to curry black support that could help save him from impeachment, or to influence the pool of potential jurors if he eventually stands trial on corruption charges.

Blagojevich clearly had been shopping around for a multi-dater who could appeal to black voters who have long been among his most loyal supporters, etc. Rep. Danny Davis said he was approached first but turned the gig down flat.

But lawmakers said the Burris appointment is unlikely to earn the governor any good will at the state Capitol, where the Illinois House impeached him last week by a vote of 114-1.

"I don't know legislators think he probably should not have made an appointment. No need to make it clear to him that we thought he had tainted the process," said Democratic state Rep. Gary Hannig.

And Andrew Reynold, a law professor at the University of Illinois, said the appointment is unlikely to make an impression on jurors if Blagojevich ends up going to trial on the criminal charges. AP

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Editor Raul D. Morales • Assistant Editor Carmia S. Nantona

BUSINESS

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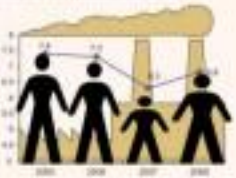
Web Content Ads, Inc.

Sun Life, GSIS drop Philamlife bids

INQUIRER MONITOR

Figures that matter in our nation's life

Unemployment at 6.9 percent (October 2005-October 2008)



Source: National Statistics Office
Kate Pontawe Inquirer Research

Pension fund chief Garcia cites 'unreasonable valuations' for AIG unit

By Doris C. Dumlao and Michelle V. Rama

SUN LIFE OF CANADA, THE SECOND BIGGEST LIFE INSURER IN the country, has dropped out of the race to acquire Philippine American Life and General Insurance Co. (Philamlife) but maintained its goal to become the leading local player by 2010.

Separately, the chief of the state-owned Government Service Insurance System yesterday said the pension fund's eyes no longer keen on joining the bidding, citing unreasonable valuations.

"This is a year of further consolidation," Sun Life Financial Philippines' CEO Henry Herrera said in an interview with the Inquirer yesterday.

From day one that AIG announced plans to sell assets after getting a lifeline from the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, Herrera said Sun Life had taken a look at assets across the region.

"In the Philippines, combining Philamlife and Sun Life will be more than 30 percent (in terms of market share). It won't be handling boutique companies, it will be subject to anti-trust laws," Herrera said.

As there was no anti-trust law in the Philippines, Herrera said Sun Life had participated in the first phase of the bidding for Philamlife but has not pursued its interest further. In the end, he said the company would like to maximize its more than 26-percent level of return on equity in the Philippines and make best use of capital.

Sun Life is Philamlife's closest rival in the Philippines, reporting total assets of about

SUN LIFE /B2

CURRENCIES

JANUARY
PESO-DOLLAR RATE
47.13 ▲ 1
as of 5 p.m., Jan. 14, 2009

STOCK MARKET
PSE COMPOSITE INDEX

(For stock market report on Page B3)

Stocks close lower

SHARE PRICES CLOSED 0.6 PERCENT lower yesterday in sectoral trading, with investors cashing in recent gains, dealers said.

The composite index shed 11.12 points to close at 1,884.83.

The broader all-shares index shed 0.3 percent to 1,255.58 points with 70 issues retreating, 58 advancing and 36 unchanged.

Turnover reached 1.27 billion shares worth P1.1 billion.

STOCKS /B3

BNP Paribas eyes 60-70% of GSIS thrift bank

By Michelle V. Rama

BNP PARIBAS HAS EXPRESSED INterest to buy 60 to 70 percent of GSIS Family Bank, which is owned by the state pension fund manager Government Service Insurance System.

BNP Paribas, one of the biggest banks in Europe, is based in France. It was created in May 2008 with the merger of Banque Nationale de Paris (BNP) and Paribas.

Winston Garcia, president and general manager of GSIS, said BNP Paribas was added to the list of potential investors in GSIS Family Bank. Besides BNP Paribas, Chinese firm International Commercial Bank of China and another local commercial bank that he did not identify have expressed interest to buy a majority stake of the bank.

ICBC has entered a due diligence mode of GSIS Family Bank and Garcia said he expected it to be done by the end of the month. But Garcia said the GSIS was still open to entertaining other possible buyers.

"[GSIS] expects to generate P3 billion to P4 billion from its plan to sell 60 to 70 percent of the bank," Garcia said in a briefing yesterday.

He said GSIS wanted to divest majority share in the thrift bank because it was no longer keen on running a bank. He said the GSIS wanted to simply consider the bank as one of its investments.

The pension fund ended up owning GSIS Family Bank, formerly a subsidiary of the defunct Combank, when it bou-

BNP /B2

Transco now in private sector hands

By Abigail L. Wu

JUST A FEW DAYS AFTER ITS REMITTANCE of P967.5 million to the government, Strategic Grid Corporation of the Philippines has officially taken over the operations of the country's electricity superhighway.

The P967.5-million remittance represented the 25-percent down payment for the 25-year concession that NGCP won through a bidding in December 2007.

As provided under the concession agreements, NGCP will pay 25 percent of its $3.95-billion bid price to the government at commencement date, and amortize the balance over the next 20 years.

During yesterday's turnover ceremony, Finance Secretary Margarito Teves said the proceeds from the concession deal would be used to prepay the debts of the cash-strapped National Power Corp.

On the operations side, NGCP president and chief executive Walter Brown said the consortium was ready to operate the transmission grid "fully from day one," or today.

TRANSCO /B2

PDIC to start paying depositors of closed banks next month

By Michelle V. Rama

PHILIPPINE DEPOSIT INSURANCE CORP. will tap the services of privately owned auditing firms to speed up the process of servicing depositors of rural banks that have shut down operations since December.

PDIC president Jose Nograles told reporters yesterday that his office has obtained proposals from four auditing firms that could possibly help the state insurer examine 123,000 bank accounts. These firms include SGV & Co., Punongbayan & Araullo, KPMG Manabat Sanagustin & Co., and Isla Lipana & Co.

A careful examination of the bank accounts is necessary to make sure PDIC will not pay depositors with dubious accounts, Nograles explained. "We cannot simply pay without examining. Otherwise we would be held liable before the COA [Commission on Audit]."

Nograles said the answer to minimize the process of examining bank accounts was necessary to service depositors of the failed rural banks as soon as possible.

PDIC /B2

Piltel completes 58M shares buyback program

By Elizabeth Sanchez-Lacson

PILIPINO TELEPHONE CORP. (PTEL), the country's third biggest cellular mobile phone provider and a unit of Smart Communications Inc., said it completed yesterday a share buyback of 58 million shares.

Piltel corporate information officer Deborah Tan said the share buyback program was approved by PTel's board last June 3 to take advantage of the weakness in the stock market and was an opportunity to support the company's share price.

She declined to disclose the average price for the buyback. Piltel closed yesterday at P7 a share, and was trading for the past 52 weeks at between P3.48 and P9.90.

Show of confidence in firm's value

The stocks bought back by the company will be held as treasury shares.

Piltel's buyback represented approximately 0.5 percent of the company's total outstanding common shares. The share buyback was aimed at sending a strong signal about the company's confidence in its higher intrinsic value compared to how the stock market has been valuing it.

"The approved share buyback program allows us to take advantage of the current weakness and volatility in the equities market which have adversely affected PTel's share price. The buyback will utilize PTel's unrestricted retained earnings and will be done down from the open market through the trading facilities of the stock exchange. The buyback also demonstrates our confidence in the continued strength of PTel's business and is not expected to affect dividend payments to our common shareholders," Piltel chair Manuel V. Pangilinan had said late last year.

PTel has more than 15 million prepaid subscribers as of mid-September 2008, under the GSM brand Talk 'N Text, the third largest brand in the country.

If it ain't got that sting

BREAKTIME

Conrado R. Bawad III

THERE COMES A TIME IN A MAN'S life when a friend who happens to be a stockbroker simply must try to convince him that the stock market is just doing great.

I had such an episode last week, courtesy of a lady friend, who inclined to me that the PSE index was screaming, "Bumili ka!" apparently to the start of a new year.

But in all my years of covering the financial markets, I should only know this since the PSEi index became Stalin's mane a thing it still got that swing!

The index really gained some lofty gains last week, but reaching was any rise to speak of the index movement's something like the start of a number upswing.

Great what—the value was down to an average of P3.4-billion a day last week, from an average of P20 billion a day in the last week of December.

Sure, local economists are not ready to declare the local economy as going into a recession, much unlike those other rich countries. Take a bow, Bataki!

But they are also saying that the Philippines will perhaps start to feel the pinch from the world financial crisis this year.

Thus, the attitude of market players is still cautious—in market parlance—one of "wait and see."

Like it or not, in many stock market players, cash nowadays is still king. I guess that's really looking for the bloodlet example. You know—"numerology?"

* * *

WHO ARE WE kidding, Tibong? Our stock market—one of the first to data—has fallen behind in making volume.

In technical terms, what the market needs is "liquidity."

Look, the public investors are still mad, with millions of pesos worth of IPO shares that they could not unload simply because there were not enough action in those shares.

And that's the problem when a market has relatively little "liquidity."

Doesn't have to stay hanging, the first semester of "liquidity"—simply known as "public interest," to the end, investors—lots of them—create the liquidity.

And why does public interest in the market come and go?

Well, basically, according to volumes economists—of academic done on our financial market, our market really allows quite a limited choice of listed companies.

Look at the IPO listings in the past few years. Except for a couple of these, they all seems, in hindsight, like fly-by-night offerings. How we know they were shares the old time "sting."

As it is, Manila, we need more listed companies that make serious money. The state-owned Pagcor comes to mind. The Mercury Drug chain is another.

Unfortunately, these big boys cannot be bothered with—what do you call again—this listing thing.

* * *

AND IG if the local boys are not interested in listing, we must look elsewhere.

Recent sex flying in the stock market about a bigtime foreign group that wants to bring into the PSE a number of foreign companies for dual listing.

Nam "dual listing" has nothing to do with split personality or something like that. It's just that these companies are already listed abroad.

It is not a new idea, surely, because one very wises PLDT, Benguet Corp. and Philex Mining are all listed in stock exchanges abroad.

Today, foreign groups such as Manulife and Bonifay are listed both here, in their home base in Canada and the United States.

Apparently, these foreign groups are something in the Philippine stock market that we don't. Some approval? Or "potential"?

Here it seems that not everybody likes the idea of dual listing here for foreign companies.

Perhaps, some people are afraid that foreign companies will just gobble up the investment funds in the country—as it should be.

I have only one question to them: What investment funds are they talking about, really?

A big part of the action in the market really comes from abroad. Consist, foreign funds, not local money, is responsible for the gains.

In the last week of December, when the market posted an average daily trading of P3.5 billion, foreign buyers accounted for P27 billion of the buying.

Certainly, if foreign companies are listed here, those foreign investors most likely will be the biggest buyers of the shares.

There is one reason why: Another stock exchange abroad is looking into the activities of these foreign listed companies. Antidote like "delisting" and "voluntary delisting."

You know—things that are still quite strange in the local stock market!

Sun Life, GSIS drop Philamlife bids

From page B1

P67 billion for the life insurance business in 2007 against the AIG unit's P100 billion.

Even without having to acquire Philamlife's assets, observers said Sun Life may see much profit in its own, being the leading player in the country. Last year, Sun Life was estimated to have generated P30 billion in first-year premium from life insurance, about P45 billion in gross sales from mutual funds and P4 billion in gross sales from unit-linked plans.

"The key measure for us is in the new business because it's this first-year premium that determines future, future," Herrera said.

Philrich management is seen as a key area of growth for the company in the future, the target is to generate at least 40 percent of its business from mutual funds and 60 percent from life insurance. But he said it would be a big challenge to overtake Bank of the Philippine Islands, which is currently the biggest player in the mutual funds industry.

BPI has P29 billion to assets under management while Sun Life has about P12.7 billion.

Meanwhile, GSIS president Winston Garcia said Philamlife officials were "asking for the moon."

Philamlife set its book value at P16 billion, Garcia said. He noted that this amount was too big for a company whose parent firm has suffered from financial losses.

Garcia also said that Philamlife was arrogant, citing the arrogant requirements set by its officials on how potential buyers could conduct a due diligence. He said Philamlife had required interested parties to first make an initial offer, which should not be lower than the P16 billion book value, before being allowed to conduct due diligence on Philamlife's books.

PDIC to start . . .

From page B1

With outsourcing, Segrado said, PDIC expects to start receiving claims of depositors by the second week of February or earlier. If PDIC were to do the examination on its own, Segrado said, it would only start receiving claims of depositors by August.

Segrado reminded that PDIC could shell out only P1.4 billion to reimburse depositors under Legacy-affiliated banks alone.

The Banglio-licensed 19 Philippines closed 12 banks either owned by or linked to the Legacy Group after determining that they were illiquid and observing unusual and unsafe banking practices.

The 12 banks included: Rural Bank of Davao Inc.; Rural Bank of Balo, Cebu-based Filipino Rural Bank, Bank of East Asia, Philippine Countryside Bank, Rural Bank of San Jose in Batangas; First Insurance Bank in Tacloban City; Leyte-based Rural Bank in Batangas; Lipa-na-based San Pablo City Development Bank; Bacolod City-based Negros Bank; General Santos City-based Rural Bank of DNPDC; Legazpi City-based Rural Development Bank, and Cebu-based Rizal Bank of Carmen.

BNP . . .

From page B1

closed on the company in the 1990s.

Garcia said the entry of an investor into GSIS Family Bank was expected to help transform it into a commercial bank.

GSIS Family Bank has 22 branches mostly in Metro Manila. The bank's head office is in Pasay City.

Garcia said the bank is allowed by the BSP to put up 40 branches. He said takeover will buy the majority stake in the bank is expected to put up more branches to customize the allowed 40.

Transco now in private . . .

From page B1

"We are committed to share by our performance from this day on that we truly merit the franchise and only because we complied with the conditions for winning it and receiving the award, but because we still dedicate ourselves to become not only the largest but the best performing example of a privatized company—one only in terms of profitability but also in terms of service to the customers, the community and the country," he said in his speech.

At the stroke of midnight last night, NGCP became the official operator of Transco, with the right to operate, manage and maintain the transmission grid for the next 25 years.

The Transco franchise was signed into law on Dec. 1, 2008, and took effect on Dec. 26, 2008, 15 days after its publication in a newspaper of general circulation.

The concession deal has a life of 25 years, extendable for another 25 years. The franchise, on the other hand, is good for 50 years.

Stocks . . .

From page B1

"Investors are cashing in excess gains. There isn't compelling news that would convince investors to pour more funds in," Lawrence de Leon of Accord Capital Equities told Dow Jones Newswires.

He cited plunging export data amid a global economic slowdown tipped the key index to settle in the 1,068-2,800 point band for now.

The composite index fell 2.3 percent to 1845 while Ayala Land was off 2.7 percent at P7.10. Metropolitan Bank dropped 2 percent to P25.

AFP

PHILIPPINE STOCK EXCHANGE
As of January 14, 2009

State's debt stock up 2%

By Michelle V Rama

THE GOVERNMENT'S DEBT STOCK ROSE 2 percent to P4.104 trillion in October last year, from P4.71 trillion in the previous month, due largely to the strengthening of the dollar.

On a year-on-year basis, the latest debt figure marked a 18.2 percent increase from only P3.798 trillion in October 2007.

The debt, if divided among the estimated 90.4 million Filipinos this year, would mean that each Filipino would have a share of P46,283 in the liabilities of the state.

The Bureau of the Treasury said that of the latest debt figure, P2.36 trillion was denominated in peso and borrowed from domestic sources. This was up 4 percent from P2.269 trillion in September 2008.

The BTr said the government sold more government securities in October than in the previous month. The government's borrowings last year were used to plug its budget deficit.

Foreign-currency denominated debt increased by P1.604 trillion at the end. This was up 0.2 percent from P1.77 trillion in September.

The BTr said the increase in the government's external debt was due to the depreciation of the peso against the US dollar and the weakening of other currencies against the greenback.

The depreciation of the peso against the dollar made the government's dollar-denominated debts more expensive to pay extra. In the meantime, the depreciation of other foreign currencies against the US dollar also made the country's liabilities denominated in those currencies more expensive.

The BTr also said the government's contingent debt stood at P526.7 billion as of end-October, up 4.7 percent from P502.9 billion in the previous month. Contingent debts are liabilities of government-owned and -controlled corporations covered by sovereign guarantees. These liabilities will have to be shouldered by the government in case of default.

Fiscal authorities said the government's debt-to-GDP ratio remains below 50 percent as it has a budget deficit, which forces it to continue borrowing to help fund all government programs and projects.

Besides covering the government projects and programs, borrowings are also used to pay maturing obligations.

Gov't to sell stake in PNOC-EC in H1

Finance chief eyes P16B from the sale

By Abigail L. Ho

THE PRIVATIZATION OF THE GOVERNMENT's 40-percent stake in PNOC Exploration Corp., which has been deferred for several times in the past due to a number of reasons, has been slated for the first semester of the year.

Finance Secretary Margarito Teves said the government was still looking at privatizing 40 percent of its stake in the state firm and that the bidding process should be concluded within the first half.

"For PNOC-EC, it will be this year. We are hoping to get the proceeds within the first semester. Of course, we have to be sensitive about the market condition and the exposure of the investors," Teves told reporters yesterday.

The privatization should have been conducted in the last quarter of 2008, but the government chose to defer it to sometime this year due to adverse market conditions.

In an earlier interview, PNOC-EC president Rudel Del Pilar said a consensus was reached last last year to have state retain 60 percent in both through with the privatization plan due to poor market conditions.

"We want to wait for better times, when the market recovers," he said.

He said the government would continue to monitor the market to determine when the best time would be to proceed with the privatization, as well as how to do it best.

The approved modes of privatization for PNOC-EC included an initial public offering, a block sale and asset sale, he added.

"These are still still being considered. The mode of privatization will depend on how much cash we need to get and how easy this money can be generated. We'll continue our monitoring of the market, and think of ways how to do (the privatization)," he said.

Teves earlier said the government hoped to generate P16 billion for its stake in PNOC-EC.

San Miguel Energy Corp. earlier expressed interest in participating in the bidding.

Del Pilar said a number of other groups had also expressed strong interest in joining the auction. He, however, declined to name them as some of them expressions of interest were solicited.

PNOC-EC is the first nine months of 2008 registered a 65-percent increase in net income to P2.43 billion, from P1.48 billion in the same period last year.

Aboitiz unit ties up with Davies Energy

ABOITIZ ENERGY SOLUTIONS Inc. has teamed up with American firm Davies Energy Systems Inc. for the joint distribution of energy efficiency technologies in the country.

Under their memorandum of understanding, the two firms will combine their expertise and technologies to come up with ways to cut energy costs for office buildings, shopping malls, commercial centers, manufacturing plants, industrial facilities and government offices.

These energy efficiency solutions can also be offered on a project financing basis, to ensure that potential customers will be able to enjoy the benefits of energy-saving technologies as they are implemented.

"Our goal is to help every company and government entity in the Philippines become as efficient in its use of energy as possible. By teaming with Davies, and by providing project financing, we can offer the comprehensive energy management technologies and the financial solutions necessary to make energy conservation and environmental sustainability a profitable venture for our customers," Aboitiz chief operating officer Benjamin Carmona said.

Aboitiz Energy is a wholly owned subsidiary of Aboitiz Power Corp.

Davies president and chief executive John Hershey said the partnership could bring down operating costs in every aspect of a facility—lighting, motors and other electrical equipment.

Davies Energy is a global energy-efficiency company with offices in the United States and Asia. Here in the Philippines, the firm has already been working with large commercial and industrial entities for six years now. —Abigail L. Ho

Qatar telecom firm acquires stake in Liberty

By Elizabeth Sanchez-Lacson

QATAR TELECOM (QTEL), THE SOLE telecommunications provider in Qatar, has acquired a substantial stake in publicly listed Liberty Telecom Holdings Inc.

In a disclosure to the stock exchange yesterday, Liberty Telecom said the Qatar Telecom Group reported in May 2008 that it had acquired, through subsidiary wi-Tribe Asia Ltd., 27.12 percent of Liberty Telecom.

In December 2008, 173,113 additional shares or 9.9 percent of the company was issued to wi-Tribe Asia and 300,451 million preferred shares or 17 percent was issued to totally incorporated White Dune Solutions Holdings Inc. at P3.20 per share or a total of P1.52 billion.

Trading of the shares of Liberty Telecom has been suspended since August 2005 after the company filed for corporate rehabilitation and received a suspension order from the Makati Regional Trial Court preventing creditors from foreclosing its assets. It last traded at 20 centavos per share on Aug. 16, 2005.

It is not clear what the shares issued in December referred to the same shares reportedly acquired by Qatar May last year.

Officials of Liberty Telecom could not be reached as of press time to clarify the matter.

wi-Tribe is a joint venture between Qtel and A.A. Tahri Group of Companies (Tahco) of Saudi Arabia. Qtel has a 75-percent stake in the joint venture.

Udenny Tobene was appointed on Jan. 14, 1994 primarily to engage in real and personal property business, and deal in stocks, bonds and other securities. It was envisioned to be the holding company for Liberty Broadcasting Network Inc. (LBNI) and Stephens Logistics Inc., the marketing and logistics partner of LBNI.

LBNI has a Congressional franchise approved in 1996 and is valid until 2034 to operate radio broadcasting stations and television stations for international and domestic communications.

In April 2003, the management of Liberty decided to suspend its business operations due to lack of capital required to sustain its operations. Four months later in the same year, Liberty filed before the Makati Regional Trial Court a petition for corporate rehabilitation. The court issued a stay order on all the company's outstanding liabilities as of Aug. 15, 2003 which also prevented creditors from foreclosing on its assets.

Sugar millers lower production forecast for crop year '08-'09

ARSING prices of fertilizers push up sugar production costs, discouraging farmers to produce more. —NOEL CELIS

By Riza T. Olchondra

THE PHILIPPINE SUGAR Millers Association (PHSMA) has lowered its sugar production forecast for crop year 2008-2009 to 2.197 million metric tons due to unfavorable weather conditions and high fertilizer prices.

"We are still finalizing our estimates but as of Dec. 31 (2008), the sectoral output was 2.197 million MT for the crop year (Sept. 1, 2008 to Aug. 31, 2009)," PHSMA executive director Ambrosio de Amaro said.

The industry earlier set its sugar production target at 2.5 million MT. This was first lowered to 2.35 million MT and, later, to 2.197 million MT. The output during the year before that (the 2007-2008 crop) stood at 2.453 million MT, which was the highest in 25 years.

The rising prices of fertilizers pushed up production costs, discouraging farmers to produce more. Yield per hectare also dropped due to reduced use of fertilizers.

Sugarcane yield is currently at 60 MT per hectare. The amount of sugar recovered from sugarcane was placed at 1.91 MT per ton of cane, according to Amaro.

Despite the lower output, Amaro said the country could still export sugar but this would depend on the actual production.

"We don't want to export now and then import later," he said.

About 157,000 MT of sugar was earmarked for export to the United States under the quota assigned to the country.

The government is expecting an additional quota of 75,000 MT this year. This would be announced by April.

Amor Bowers, PHSMA legal officer, said the sugar industry was confident the US would be confirming the additional import volume from the Philippines.

He said the US had to import more sugar as American farmers had been planting less sugarcane and more of higher-value crops such as corn and soybean.

The Sugar Regulatory Administration is expected to announce on Feb. 5 the volume of sugar to be earmarked for the world market.

Holders of sugar quotas are not willing to sell their stocks to the world market due to low prices. Sugar trade in the world market for only P680 per 50-kilo bag, much lower than the production cost of P950 per bag, which farmers harvested recently due to high fertilizer prices.

The domestic mill gate price is expected to be higher at P970 to P1,025 per bag.

Because of the vulnerability of local sugar to world market prices, the industry is seeking the reclassification of Philippine sugar from sensitive to highly sensitive products under the Asean Free Trade Agreement.

Without the reclassification, the tariff on sugar will be slashed to 28 percent this year from 38 percent, exposing the local industry from import threats.

Under the tariff reduction program of the Aba, the tariff on sugar could be further pruned down to 0 to 5 percents by 2015.

Mindanao moving forward in 2009

THE YEAR 2008 PLAYED A SOUNDcare milestone for Mindanao.

We have proven in the past that we could withstand challenges and obstacles. Local and foreign investors have overflowed in Mindanao that it could now be considered the priority location for business due to its natural resources and highly skilled human resources.

Mindanao, specifically Davao City, is now considered the next generation ICT hub. According to the Global Off-shoring Study conducted by BMO, three years from now, the city will emerge as one of the top sites for off-shore business processes. It stems as par with other locations like Montevideo, Uruguay; Jakarta, Indonesia; and Guadalajara, Mexico. It also showed that the city could be ranked higher than other tier 2 off-shoring cities globally.

The city's various educational institutions yield more information technology and BPO (business process outsourcing) qualified graduates than Subic, Clark and Baguio by 600 percent, 270 percent and 40 percent, respectively. The .88 x-factoring, Davao and Mindanao's largest call center operator, is among others, could hardly cope up with the demands of contact centers from Manila that had just up-offices in Davao City.

Davao City's population is 71 percent higher than Cebu City, 400 percent larger than Olongapo-Subic City, 250 percent higher than Angeles-Clark, and 240 percent larger than Baguio City. The city's estimated workforce is more of Cebu, 9 times of Iloilo, 7 times of Clark and 6 times of Baguio.

MINDANAOWORLD

Jojit Baguio-Ilaan

This has not even taken into account the manpower pool Davao City's neighboring cities and provinces can offer.

As of today, the city already has about 10 BPO ventures and is expressing more to open in two giant malls—one of Ayala and Ayalaland and the other of Robinson's—will open 15 BPO parks late this year. The creation of the parks will generate more jobs and attract more investors to locate in Mindanao.

The group of IT-BPO parks in Mindanao created a lot of opportunities for its locals. Mindanao can now be considered one of the fastest rising cities in the country.

A government-owned telephone company also eyes Mindanao as an investment destination for its expansion.

Virgilio Leyesmeta of Mindanao Economic Development Council said representatives of Telekom Brunei Berhad (Telbru) had met with Davao City's ICT players.

Telbru board chair and delegation head Dato Pushbi Hj Othman expressed the company's interest in exploring possible partnership with IT-BPO sector in Mindanao.

Mindanao's communications technology has gone greater heights. There are already 749,217 installed fixed telephone lines in Mindanao, 55 percent of which had already been in use. This translates to 347,344 fixed telephone subscribers due to limited supply. It is continuously developing, with the investments inflows from foreign BPO players.

With this developments, Mindanao has placed itself in the ICT/BPO investment destination map. Looking forward, Mindanao can easily become one of the investment top choices.

Mindanao is also known for the abundance of its agricultural resources and products. In 2008, Land Bank of the Philippines facilitated P37.2 billion loan to Mindanao. It was used mainly by Mindanao farm growers for the expansion and upgrading of their farm facilities.

Gaisano Mall remains Mindanao's top export product, accounting for 31 percent of its export revenue in the first half of 2008. It posted export earnings of $481.18 million in the first quarter, or 186 percent higher than year-ago level.

Banana trade is big by posting $204.86 million in export receipts, up 4.7 percent from a year ago. Banana chips from Easchocovers Mindanao were the only ones spared when Chinese authorities confiscated banana product shipments from the Philippines due to reports that the products contained high levels of sulfur dioxide, a preservative.

Other top export earners are organic chemicals such as fructol, oryl and stearyl alcohol, which generated $79.83 million; fire-rolled iron products and non-alloy steel, $67.21 million; iron ore agglomerates fabricated, $64.45 million; rubber rests, $64.37 million; processed pineapples, $53.34 million; tuna at $50.23 million; and fresh pineapples, $43.25 million.

Canned tuna remained the top export product of General Milling, earning $136.48 million in the first half of the year.

Mindanao's top export-market is the United States of America, which gets at least 25 percent of its shipments.

Medco said the other major export markets of Mindanao were the Netherlands for coconut oil (crude and refined), China for nickel ores and concentrates, South Korea for organic chemicals and fresh bananas, Malaysia, Iran, Taiwan, and Singapore.

Mindanao's export to Indonesia jumped 998 percent.

In the first half of 2008, Mindanao's exports to Indonesia jumped 998 percent or $34 million from only $3.4 million in 2007.

It also posted a 70-percent increase in exports to Taiwan to $11 million in the first semester last year from $7.8 million in 2007.

Mindanao has proven that even with the global economic recession, it can keep its economy growing. Our rich natural resources and the strong confidence of the Mindanaoans will attract the best investors and traders.

Jojit Baguio-Ilaan is an educator for the development of the region. She is chair of Ayli Baguio Foundation. E-mail: commentsbaguioilaan@yahoo.com.

SM Fairview opens annex today

By Doris C. Dumlao

SM PRIME HOLDINGS INC., THE country's largest mall developer, is opening today the SM City Fairview Annex in Novaliches, Quezon City.

This will add 28,600 square meters of gross floor area to the main mall, increasing SM City Fairview's total GFA to 182,703 sq. m.

"With the expansion of both SM Fairview and SM North Edsa, which also happens to be our very first mall, Quezon City remains one of SM Prime's most important land positions, and continues to be a domain for further growth," SM Prime president Hans Sy said in a statement yesterday.

The opening of SM City Fairview Annex is expected to create, directly and indirectly, about 1,500 in new jobs.

The SM City Fairview Annex has 98,100 sq.m. of gross leasable area and will have at its mall tenants Ace Hardware, Timezone, Cinder Pitt's, Watsons, Rustan's Kitchen Center, Center for Pop Music, All Flip Flops, and People & Books, among others.

Last year, SM Prime launched SM City Marikina, the SM Megamall Bridgeway, SM City Sorsogon in Sorsogon, The Annex at SM City North Edsa and SM City Bicutan in Bicutan were also opened.

BUSINESS

Bernanke warns stimulus alone not enough

Citigroup merges brokerage unit with Morgan Stanley

NEW YORK/SINGAPORE—US Federal Reserve Chair Ben Bernanke warned fiscal stimulus alone would not overcome the global economic crisis as Presidents-elect Barack Obama pledged more control over a remaining $350 billion to bailout funds.

Citigroup moved toward dismantling what was the world's biggest financial services group, as it agreed to merge its Smith Barney brokerage with Morgan Stanley's wealth management business, and chair Robert Rubin stepped down as a director.

The moves sent Wednesday into the 1930s but sent policymakers reaching to limit the damage in the face of sharply slowing growth and rising unemployment.

US retail data for December, due later on Wednesday, was expected to confirm a struggling economy and shrinking consumer spending.

IMF chief Dominique Strauss-Kahn said on Tuesday the global outlook was uncertain and warned the IMF was likely to slash its already gloomy growth forecasts.

Bernanke said that while an organized US stimulus package could provide a "significant boost" to the economy, the government may need to inject more capital into banks and consider buying financial institutions' toxic assets.

"Fiscal actions are unlikely to promote a lasting recovery unless they are accompanied by strong measures to further stabilize and strengthen the financial system," Bernanke said in a speech in London.

Outgoing Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson and Bernanke had pressed Congress in September to approve the $700-billion bailout fund to the government could buy up the bad debts to stave off a financial calamity.

But Paulson turned his focus to purchasing equity in banks, which he has argued was a quicker way to shore up the system.

With half the money already spent, Obama (next) has first big test persuading skeptics in Congress to release the remaining $350 billion as it is in place when he takes office next week.

Obama was even more insistent who had threatened to block the release of funds, whose urgent need was highlighted by data on Tuesday showing the biggest drop in the US trade deficit in 12 years—a clear sign of a fast weakening global economy.

Citigroup, which has received $45 billion from the government under the bailout and is expected to report a big fourth-quarter loss, is planning to adopt the equivalent of a "good bank, bad bank" structure, a person familiar with the plans said.

The plan envisions focusing on corporate, investment and retail banking and keeping a

(For related story on this page).

"We know the outlook is awful, but then we know that the market has priced in a very bleak scenario," said Lee Hick-Heng, strategist at Fortunaid Growth Management in Australia.

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Asian shares recover, but confidence lags

HONG KONG—ASIAN SHARES RECOVERED yesterday from a steep five-day sell-off and oil rose on expectations of production cuts, though the mood remained cautious given ongoing worries about the economic outlook.

The MSCI index of Asia-Pacific stocks outside Japan advanced 2.2 percent by early yesterday afternoon, rebounding from a 9-percent loss over the previous five sessions.

The index remains down around 2.5 percent for the year.

Concern about the global economy remains. Data on Tuesday showed US imports fell a record 22 percent in November, a bad omen for global companies that rely on US consumers to power earnings.

Corporate earnings are being hit across the world, resulting in job cuts that could fuel further sizable consumer spending.

South Korea suffered its first monthly net job loss in more than five years in December, data on Wednesday showed.

Still, some shares posted gains on Wednesday as some investors saw recent steep declines in shares such as Sony Corp. as overdone.

The Nikkei average advanced 0.3 percent, recovering from its near 5-percent drop on Tuesday.

Taiwan shares jumped 3.5 percent after sources said Chrysler was in talks to sell assets to Hotai Motor and auto supplier Mogra.

Hewei Gas Tonghua Corp. was in talks to buy Fushun Ltd.'s hard-disk drive business in a deal reportedly worth $340,400 mil. Both were built up over 5 years.

Shares in Hong Kong, Shanghai and India gained 2.3 percent each, while indexes in South Korea and Singapore advanced over 1 percent each. Taiwan posted a modest loss.

Oil rode oil futures, meanwhile, rose $1.55 to $58.15 a barrel as Opec kept up its talk of production cuts and a cold snap in the United States boosted heating oil demand.

Crude prices have plunged more than $110 since hitting a record high just under $150 a barrel in July.

Reuters

TRADERS work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. US stocks were little changed on Tuesday as investors followed a two-day slide by snapping up energy shares on a recovery in oil prices, while hopes for more funds to stabilize credit markets offset worries about Citigroup's outlook. REUTERS

Credit market begins to thaw

NEW YORK—CREDIT MARKETS ARE BEGINning to thaw after months of deep freeze.

In a promising turn that could bolster the economy, companies are selling bonds at a pace not seen since last spring. At the same time, companies are finding it easier in recent days to get the short-term loans necessary for quick access to cash.

Global sales of new corporate debt jumped to $83 billion last week, the highest since $103 billion last May and nearly double the level seen right before the credit crisis intensified in September, according to data tracker Dealogic.

If the trend continues, it would be the outcome that government officials have been seeking for months, as they pumped hundreds of billions of dollars into the financial system. More could be on the way.

A credit freeze hits the economy hard because it forces companies to lay off workers because they can't make payrolls and to cut back on investments.

"There is a domino effect if companies can't borrow," said Lou Kiser, managing director at Brentwood Capital.

To be sure, danger still looms in the credit markets. Bank lending remains at a choke hold and will likely stay that way as long as financial companies covered with massive losses hold on to mortgage-related assets and other bad debt.

But other corners of the debt market are improving.

Some of the smartest appetite has been for debt backed by the government, including a $10-billion general-electric bond offering.

Investors also have narrowed interest in speculative bonds—also known as "junk"—that offer higher interest rates than they could get by owning US government debt, where yields have plummeted to record lows in the last month.

Another significant shift in credit markets is showing up in the substantial increase in the issuance of commercial paper, which companies roll as a low-cost source of cash used to meet short-term financial needs. AP

INCENTIVE FOR INVESTORS

Qatar minister says $70 right oil price

NEW DELHI—A PRICE OF $70 A barrel is right for oil to keep companies and producers investing in new resources, Qatar's oil minister said yesterday.

"Low oil prices will reduce a lessen in investment in new resources. When growth comes back, we will have another shock, as resources will not be there to meet demand," Abdullah al-Attiyah said on the sidelines of the Petrotech conference.

Attiyah said he did not know every high prices either.

"$70 will be an incentive to maintain and oil producers to keep investing. Oil prices over $100 are not logical. I also don't appreciate low oil prices," he added.

In late November, when oil prices were around $50 a barrel, Saudi Arabia said $75 a barrel is a fair price for oil, the first time in years that the world's biggest exporter identified a price target.

On Wednesday, US crude rose over 3 percent to above $50 a barrel as Opec kept up its talk of production cuts and a cold snap in the United States boosted heating oil demand.

While the oil producers are contemplating ways to prop up crude prices, Attiyah said gas producers did not have such an agenda.

"Unlike oil, gas and LNG are 25-year, long-term take-or-pay contracts driven by a formula. This is different from oil as gas is still on long-term contracts," Shaykh Jo-Al years have these contracts still current into 2025," he said.

Energy ministers of 12 gas-exporting countries met in Moscow last month to create the Gas Exporting Countries Forum.

"They have already signed a charter in Moscow. Qatar will be the headquarters for the international gas forum organization," he said.

Qatar is the world's largest LNG exporter. *Reuters*

Gambling heir looks to Taiwan

MACAU—MACAU GAMBLING HEIR Lawrence Ho is looking to expand his empire to Taiwan as it ends a decades-old ban on casinos—but not if it risks angering China, which claims sovereignty over the island.

In an interview here with AFP, the 31-year-old son of Macau gaming czar Stanley Ho said he was enthused by the approval by Taiwan's parliament Monday of a bill allowing casinos to be built on its offshore islands.

"Subject to the credit market, we are very interested," the chief executive officer of Melco Crown Entertainment said.

"I have given a few speeches in Taiwan. We've looked at the market quite a bit extensively in the past few years."

But he cautioned that good relations between Taiwan and China were crucial.

"Our relationship with China is key to us, we wouldn't want to do anything to piss them off," he said in English, adding that Taiwan's economic policies would also be a factor.

Self-ruled Taiwan split from the mainland in 1949, and bilateral relations are only just starting to warm up under the new China-friendly administration that took power in Taipei last year.

He said Japan was another big Asian market that interests him but that he would ensure any expansion would not hurt his gaming business in Macau, which will remain his base.

HO

Ho's company is backing Kuwait Joint venture with Australian entrepreneur Jerome Pacheli, is one of six concessionaires allowed to operate casinos in the southern Chinese city.

His competitors include US giant Wynn and Las Vegas Sands, Australia Or Aspar Dr. Macau (MO) run by Stanley Ho, and MGM Grand Macau, a joint venture between Mr Ho's elder sister Pansy and Vegas firm MGM Mirage.

Like his rivals, his six-star hotel Crown Macau was hit after Beijing last year tightened visa restrictions on mainland visitors to Macau, who constitute the bulk of their customers.

It resulted in a 10-percent drop in Macau's gaming revenues for the third quarter last year, official statistics showed.

But Ho said he believed the city's economy would rebound after bottoming the bottom in the fourth quarter and China would relax its visa policies over the next few months.

"We are very bullish," he added, speaking after announcing Tuesday that his $2.1 billion entertainment resort, City of Dreams, would open as planned in the second quarter of this year.

His company will recruit 7,000 people over the next few weeks.

"It is not the worst time in the world to open a new property," he said.

The project, centered around a complex with 950 rooms and 1,500 machines, is entering completion on the Cotai Strip, where Sheldon Adelson's Las Vegas Sands has Venetian Macao and Four Seasons.

His rivals says by newer gambler—is often seen as Macau's next "gambling king" after his father, who has three decades enjoyed a monopoly here until the government liberalized the gaming sector in 2002. AFP

Editor Thelma Sioson San Juan

LIFESTYLE Food

Food for the gods ice cream, carpaccio and choco cupcakes

I'VE FORGOTTEN HOW EXCITED people get going through recipes and sewing photographs of finished products.

KITCHEN RESCUE

Maggie Asperas

That's how last week's humdrum editorial meeting turned out. Our numerous newsroom cooks, raving the recipes were "haha-hagulano!" In what ever many are happy, that is where all must focus.

Likewise, I, where am asking for a carpaccio recipe. So, Lhoh, this is it! Who better to give it to you than the restaurant that is named and serves de-licious Carpaccio!

Trivia: The dish is named after Venetian Renaissance painter Vittore Carpaccio. Its menu for his use of red in his works. The dish was invented by Giuseppe Cipriani in

CARPACCIO'S Beef Carpaccio

Carpaccio alla Cipriani

400 g beef tenderloin
80 g parmesan cheese
1 ½ tbsp extra virgin olive oil
freshly ground black pepper

FOOD FOR CI

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Log on to www.themayakitchen.com or e-mail at mayakitchen@themayakitchen.com

THE QUIET DINER

RESTOS AT A GLANCE

From crepes to 'adobo'

HERE IS A TRIO OF RESTAURANTS. two are influenced by the now popular Mediterranean cuisine while the third is basically Filipino.

One is a takeoff from the French pancake, another honors the memory of a mother, and the third offers an approximation of food from Turkey, Italy and Greece.

Cafe Breton—G/F, Greenbelt 3, facing the chapel; call 757-0125.

This is inspired by the French pancake served in Brittany (Bretagne). It has many branches, including one on the highway in Tagaytay.

Dining area—Very noisy. Mediterranean-inspired decor. Windows but no door. Tables squeezed in, not much room to move.

Staff—Where are waiters when you need one? A couple showed up after a while.

Service—Average, and the girl did not know what Breton meant.

Ingredients' mood—Original. Breton crepes (in France) are desserts made from wheat flour, spread with butter and jam, eaten hot. Some savory pancakes are garnished with eggs, cheese and vari-ous cold meats. These are the main offerings. We suggest the Niçoise crepe, with cream and mushrooms, P350. Then Breton: bacon's an ok P195 per serving. Cap the meal with either Coffee with Irish cream, Cointreau or Cold Espresso with whipped cream—between P130 and P180.

They add the usual charges. Seniors get their discount.

Rating

Help Pa—2/L, Greenbelt 3, right of the escalator; call 7286878.

This is the late Larry Cruz's tribute to his mother, serving Filipino food, a time-zone accession exclusive to this restaurant.

Dining area—Very crowded, poor acoustics, one needs to speak at the top of one's voice to be heard, even by the person across the table.

Staff—They appear confused. Seemingly there is no waiter assigned per table or section. Managers hardly visible, so hard to seek her out for a problem-set had encountered.

Service—Poor. They seem unable to

FROM PREVIOUS C4

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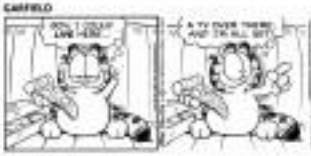


JL LIPIN

FUGAO BANDY

DICK TRACY

LOVEKNOTS

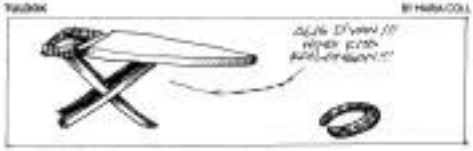
JAMES BOND

DIVINE COMEDY

BABY BLUES

ATOMO AND WEEGY

TUKBOK



KING MACHINE

BEN

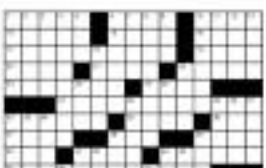
DAILY CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1 "Lies ... Tells a better"
8 Iron-cooper's UNSA
14 Feelings
15 Partner of "The Gentle Sex"
16 Lebanese base
18 Concluded
19 Start of a quip
20 Big-eye babies
21 Ca-Mills bath
23 It is not said
24 Center
27 Watch of Alaskans' films
29 Garden vegetables
31 Part 2 of quip
33 Touch tenderly
35 Nobel battery name
36 Cyst, like
37 Brought into play
39 Tattoo, e.g.
40 End of quip
46 Notes of scales
47 What organs of fifty indicates the way
48 Part 3 of quip
49 Burn a lot
50 Bit of tennis
51 Miniature cloth
52 Gallon measure
53 Award for a sitcom
56 Beverly areas
60 End of quip
62 Radar quantity
63 Make mistakes
64 Orchestra instruments
65 Observed
66 Apply wicks
67 Merchant's name

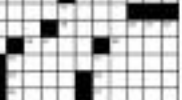
DOWN

1 Add to
2 Wrinkle
3 Cycle in a laundromat
4 City on the Allegheny
5 Modest off



By Alan P. Eisenberg
Huntington Beach, CA

Wednesday's Puzzle Solved



HOROSCOPE

BY FRANCIS DRAKE

CONCEPTIS SU DOKU

Conceptis Sudoku

By Dave Green

7					4			8
	8		5	3		9	1	
	5							
6							2	
	7			8			6	
	9							7
							8	
	2	8		9	3		5	
4			7					1

Difficulty Level ★★★

HOW TO PLAY SU DOKU

Fill the grid so that every column, every row and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9.
Tips and program at www.sudoku.com

Answer to previous puzzle

2	8	9	1	7	4	5	3	6
1	3	5	2	8	6	7	8	4
8	4	7	8	3	5	2	9	1
4	9	8	3	2	1	6	5	7
7	1	6	5	9	8	3	4	2
3	5	2	6	4	7	9	1	8
5	6	4	9	1	2	8	7	3
9	7	3	4	8	6	1	2	5
6	2	1	7	5	3	4	6	9

We shall miss Rose and that giggle

COUNTRY COOKING

Micky Fonte

THE MESSAGE WAS SENT ON FB mobile, but it was very little information—only that Rose Pimentel died at midnight after cardiac arrest. My first thoughts were of Rose, her "boyfriend" as Rose would call her husband, and of her children, Chris, daughters and a son.

I first met Rose and Boni at Escondo, the Pimentels' restaurant in Intramuros, years ago during a promotion featuring the homestyle cooking of Filipino heroes.

It was an interesting festival that took several months to complete and was researched ably by Gina Mirina, director of National Museum. And then came more preparations featuring something Filipino as befits the name and location of the restaurant.

One of those was the inauguration of the garden for wedding events, which artistic director Boni Cabrera helped landscape using traditional flowers and plants. Another time, it was to roll postmarkers of the plans for Rizal Day at the Quirino Grandstand with actors dressed to look like our national hero.

Rose's giggle

Always, Rose would be there to host, explain and giggle with us about some amusing details that happened years ago, yesterday or that day.

It was the giggle I remember most especially. I suppose that unexpected laughter helped relieve her the stress of running several restaurants and outlets to office buildings and malls.

She must have treasured the times she could remove herself from the day-to-day running of their business.

For three days every year we would meet in Baguio for our yearly culinary judging stint at Bo Baptista Country Club. It wasn't work for us; it was fun letting our hair down during the off hours.

Once, we went with Bea Bautista eating our way through Cuenca and being lectured on the art in churches. We were our regulars at the Cinema Film festival as guests of the Baroness Philippine Rothschild through Vita Wills (then she and Boni were three years after Cris).

I thought we could share our experiences one of these days. I may, but Rose looking at me in her "I told you so" pose with lips pursed and eyes awkward to slits, and then that sudden giggle to let me know that it's okay.

ROSE Pimentel

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- Chef Gene Gonzalez,
President & Head Chef Instructor of CACS

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- Summer Lifestyle Classes - March 2009
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FMA dance at Bacolod Festival

Dances and music of Bacolod

By Jeffrey Lee Florendo
Contributor

STREET DANCING IS An inevitable feature of every festival in the country.

The Bacolodian celebration of the Chinese New Year in Bacolod City (from "Bacolod" and lindao meaning great celebration in Chinese) is now on its fourth year.

Like the Masskara, Bacolod's October festival, Bacolodlao mixes Latin, Filipino and American pop favorites.

This year, Rene Hinojales, a resident of Bacolod who's a well-known dance instructor and last year's vice chair of the dance committee of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), is devising a more relevant and meaningful content and context to the music and choreography of Bacolodlao.

"In the past years," says Hinojales, "Chinese and Filipino cultural dances and songs were presented back to back. This year we are merging these into one. We are merging the peculiar Bacolod culture with what we find lastly know as the Chinese culture, to motifs and terms, to gestures and costumings.

"Latin and Asian and especially Chinese sounds will be mixed with Bonggo folk music," Hinojales says.

"Visuals will likewise fuse Hinojales's mask 'smiles' with Chinese opera's 'happy' make-up. Costumes, in the street dancing participated in by the hamtongpo in Bacolod, will also introduce the colorful blend of cultures."

Hinojales points out the cultural similarities, or borrowings, in Filipino and Chinese culture.

For instance, he says, the coloring, performed in Abra during the Christmas season, is danced to a mix of Chinese and Filipino music. There are many comparable movements in arnis and the Chinese martial arts. If we listen closely there are fragments of Lumi in Chinese opera that echo our kundiman.

Hinojales is very particular about the sound: "I want a fusion of the Chinese sounds of today. Like that of rock idol Faint and Vanaya, melody sung in Bonggo lyrics "that don't necessarily require you to understand the words." How so?

"It's just words like in any danceable music that will make you want to move with it. It has the immediate sentiments of, say, 'Macarena' or Vilma Santos's 'Papaya.'"

Reviving sounds

Whether he will get it right or not from Bacolod's famous DJ Rembok, who is remixing the sounds, remains to be heard. Choreography for the street dancing and the cultural shows, is Hinojales's forte.

"There are two Chinese 'fusions' in Bacolod—the old guard and new Turks. I want to see these factions like two dragons intertwined with each other and becoming as one. So it is with the street dancing and the cultural shows: there should be a beautiful intertwining of cultures."

He has interesting observations about Chinese dances.

"In their steps, the feet glide into ground more than they do to Thai, Balinese or Vietnamese dances. And there's always a notion of roundness in the choreographic phrases, that echo the movements of winds and other Chinese martial arts."

Hinojales says the fluid movements are reminder of Muslim dances, like the Singkil.

And like in many Filipino folk dances, Chinese dances are imitative of the movements of birds and animals and other mythical creatures.

"And one only has to observe closely to see that exercises of the Chinese mountain tribes are remarkably similar to the exercises of our own mountain tribes," Hinojales says.

Much of what you will see in the cultural shows during the Bacolodlao, Jan. 23-26, will also be the creative work of St. Louis of the Chinese Catholic school, St. John's Institute (**letter known as Hua Ming**, and Gentle Genesis of Trinity Christian School, another Chinese school in Bacolod.

See how these different cultures of music and dance blend into the festival of Bacolodlao Viva Bacolod City.

PDI LIFESTYLE KITCHEN-TESTED RECIPE

'Adobong kangkong'

By Norma Chiñarro
Contributor

NOW THAT THE HOLIDAY season is over, so too should be indulgent eating. Time to think again of healthier, lighter dishes. Here's a recipe that gives the traditional adobong kangkong a new twist. Instead of using vinegar, it uses balsamic salad dressing. This gives the kangkong a milder, less acidic taste and a more interesting one, too.

The dried layer makes a good substitute for the usual pork while fried garlic bits add crunch and flavor.

New Style Adobong Kangkong

1 bunch (about 350 g) kangkong (morning cabbage)
1 tbsp cooking oil
½ small onion
2 cloves garlic
2 tbsp balsamic salad dressing
1 tbsp light soy sauce
¼ to cup dried boiled taro, well-drained
Salt to taste
1-2 tbsp fried garlic bits

Wash the kangkong well and separate the leaves from the stalks. Heat oil in a skillet and sauté onion and garlic. Add the kangkong stalks and sauté for about 30 seconds. Stir in kangkong leaves and sauté for one minute.

Pour in balsamic dressing and soy sauce. Add taro and, if desired, season with salt. Transfer to a serving platter. Top with garlic bits.

Tips

- The stalks of the kangkong take a little longer to cook. Resist the need to separate them from the leaves. For that reason, they're also cooked 30 seconds longer than the leaves.
- If the taro is too salty, soak the whole taro for a few minutes in cold water. Drain well and pat with paper towels before slicing.
- Fried garlic bits are available in bottles and sold in the condiments section of supermarkets. They're also available in specialty shops and delis.
- Do not overcook the kangkong to retain their nutrients.

From crepes to 'adobo'

Photograph by

RATING INDEX: Poor · Good · Excellent

sausage big crowd of diners, kitchen must have around imperiled. One load, the first course, came more than an hour after we sat down.

Suggested meal—Delicious food is more an excuse for bad service, however, we recommend Kare-Kare Club, Lolo Ising's (Cruz's grandmother whose photo hangs on one wall) Ivy Pork Adobo, Crispy Fried Tilapia roasted with plain onion, Tagudilat sauté, Pansit. Plus the dessert of Sorvete di Mais (Mahiling) of Ramon, Mango and Ice cream. An average check would be less than P600 per person.

Service charge and government taxes are added to the check. Senior card honored.

Rating

Sophie's Mediterranean Restaurant and Deli—Portigas Center, Filinvest Corporate City, Muntinlupa; call 7717717.

This is one of the latest to join the ranks of restaurants in the area, providing residents and visitors a good selection.

Dining area—That it is small two-story establishment done in blue and beige. Considerably quiet and well-ventilated. If you are more than six people, dine upstairs. Photos of the countries whose cuisine they feature decorate the walls.

Staff—In neat white and black uniforms. They are attentive, ready to take orders.

Service—We suggest saucy dishes, such as Kibbino Lamb, served in appropriate plates, not in a flat plater. Remember to correct immediately after a plate is seen empty.

Suggested meal—To start, order Squid Rings and Mixed up with top of the Cucumber Pizzas. Hummus with mushroom and capers or Mariyya with dried fruits and mushrooms. Both come in two sizes, 9" and 12". from P240 to P360. If you are more than four, main course can be one of the Group Platters such as Mixtureone group (which is flavorful, P375; Italian Roast Chicken with potatoes and carrots, P420, and Arak (Lamb) Kibbino, P600, which we found a bit lacking in traditional spices. For Desse, choose Vangole (P270). Servings are big. The Greek Baklava is among the desserts, as is Hawaiian.

Usual charges are added to the bill. Senior card honored.

Rating

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La Dolce Vita is located along Polaris St., Makati City.

Still P39 in '09

Jollibee offers great value for money with all-new 39pcs Rice Meals. Available from Monday to Friday, this new batch of all-new 39pcs comes with seasoned vegetables as side dish and simple with rice and vegetables. Beef Strips flavored with teriyaki sauce, four-piece Shanghai Rolls and one-piece Burger Steak.
To upgrade any of the 39pcs, add P15 and get a regular soft drink or add P20 to complete the meal with a regular soft drink and vanilla cone twist.

Strawberry banana samba

Have a taste of Strawberry Banana Samba at Dakasi Bar by Chaun Dixon located at San Miguel By the Bay, behind SM Mall of Asia, and Dencochon Spoon Ice Cream Café at Robinsons Manila Midtown. The concoction is made of fresh strawberries and bananas with two scoops of ice cream, plus whipped cream and syrup.

Pasta festival

The Peninsula Manila's Mi Place presents Pasta Fresca festival until Jan. 25. Call 887-2888 ext. 6767 and 6768 (Mi Place) or 6884 (restaurant reservations).

Year of the Ox celebration

Crowne Plaza Galleria Manila welcomes the Year of the Ox with a 15-day celebration on Jan. 28 to Feb. 8. Cendrillon Chinese New Year with fireworkers, dragon and lion dances, colorful lanterns, money trees and a dining experience in the hotel's Dragon restaurant Xin Tian Di. Featured dishes are steamed prawns with garlic, braised pak'o with mushroom, abalone and sea cucumber with oyster sauce, braised dried oysters with sea moss and vegetables, fried whole lapu-lapu with fresh scallops and prawns and Chef's Divine Platter. Call 635-9114/6633-7222 loc. 7222 or 386-2600 e-mail fnb.reservations@ihg.com.

Flavorful roasts

Kenny's Roast & Grill at LCC Power Plant Mall in Rockwell, Makati offers roasted and grilled dishes like 425 BBQ Ribs (Dish), Lamb Chops, Norwegian Salmon, Tiger Prawns, Pork Chops, Chicken Fillet and Classic Roast Chicken.

Barbecue treats

Texas Smoke 'Em serves smoked barbecue (baby back ribs, beef ribs, sausages, lamb ribs and chicken), Mexican wraps such as tacos and enchiladas, cold beer and wine pairings. Also has chili con's, Texas chunky chili, fried plantain cubes, fried Oreos, hot bacon and gravy rice and the barbecue sides: Texas corn-n-beer fritters, chicken, pork, sausages or fish. The menu also offers dishes/changes, bun fillings and sandwiches. If you're not into barbecue, try Chicken Mole (chicken stew cooked in chocolate and Mexican spices) and Texas Beef and Sausage Stew.
Texas Smoke 'Em is located at G/L, Greenbelt 3, Ayala Center. Call 729-3556.

Seafood specialties

Enjoy lunch and dinner buffet of seafood dishes and other specialties at The Red Crab's Seafood Deli, Greenbelt 3, Makati City. The restaurant also serves ala carte. It offers Asian, Spanish, American and modern Filipino dishes. Call 757-8139/757-8216. Red Crab is also located in Tomas Morato. Tel. 373-8486.

Food for the gods ice cream, carpaccio and choco cupcakes

From page 41

arugula/rukon green arugula, grana or spinach

- Trim cranberries, syrup with pinch Elda and pilaca in freezer.
- Slice strawberries very thinly and arrange on a plate.
- Sprinkle beef with extra virgin olive oil, freshly ground black pepper and Parmesan shavings.
- Garnish with lemon wedge and greens of your discretion.
- Optional: The beef carpaccio could be served with Parmesan cream salad or light Gorgonzola cream sauce flavored with lemon juice and black pepper.

And speaking of carpaccio, **Carpaccio the renaissance is back!** The renovation period allowed the chefs to work on their recipes, making it an authentic re-creation! In the time though, the dishes are placed immediately, served in an ambiance as rare and cozy.

If you're a carpaccio person, try: a three and say their Carpaccio Parmesano, beef carpaccio with extra virgin olive oil and parmesan shavings, served with fresh mushrooms and arugula salad. They also have lamb carpaccio and my personal favorite, Carpaccio di Salmone e Branzino alla Mediterranea. Salmon & seabass topped with tomatoes, garlic, basil, capers and onions in olive oil.

7430 Makati St., San Antonio Vil. Sign, Makati City. Call 8913286.

The word "homemade" has many connotations. To me, it means extreme goodness, the best from mom's household made from scratch ingredients.

To me "homemade" is a label a great responsibility. Take the case of Rodan Sonnicat.

I first knew about her three years ago when I tasted her chocolate cupcakes filled with caramel and topped with buttercream.

I loved those cupcakes not just for their taste but also for their wholesomeness. Every piped chocolate ganache and was so perfect it seems machine-made.

My kindness for Sonnicat's sweets hasn't waned. Her Gianduiotti, Belgian Chocolate, Vanilla Chocolate Chip Cookies and Food for the Gods will always be on my best of the best list of favorite foods.

This time, I must say that Sonnicat outdid herself. She churned out a bucket of Food for the Gods Ice Cream for me as Christmas present. She said it was something she did for her family, using whatever leftovers from Christmas series.

Every spoonful is filled with chomps of buttery food for the gods. There are chunks of dates and walnuts, folded in vanilla ice cream base. To one word— ZSUPERB!!! Super yummy!

I will stick my neck out for this ice cream concoction. I asked if she was selling, she said no. But my persistence paid off, and now, shucks.

In fact, she has Pieces, not like those in carinderia, but a package of a dozen of your favorite cookies or bars, matched with a bucket of ice cream of the same flavor.

Aside from the food for the gods bar and her cookie combo, she also has Oblockchilli Chocolate Chip with Vanilla Swirl and Coffee Fudge Sliders Brownie—all delicious.

I was trying to photograph Rodan's Pieces combination, for the packaging was just too beautiful, but I decided to go for her cupcake logo—only because my camera skills could not capture what my mind could. But then again, it was a lot. Rodan's soul definitely gets my palate and my mommy's seal of approval.

Rodan Sonnicat—(63-7-8336286

My new class schedules are on: I am also conducting a culinary trip to Dumaguete where food historian Lilian Soriaston and I will teach old Dumaguete recipes and cooking techniques. For inquiries, call 9995966, (035) 2252348.

E-mail the author at vaganza@inquirer.com.ph

Edna Bueno-O. Velarde

ENTERTAINMENT

E-mail: entertainment@inquirer.com.ph
Website: www.inquirer.net/entertainment

RP-bound foreign acts in early '09

By Pocholo Concepcion

LAST YEAR'S CONCERT SCENE WAS SUFficient for the merry mix of musical styles that foreign acts offered.

There was rock (Bill Get Big, My Chemical Romance, Lifehouse, Incubus, Maroon 5, Daughtry), jazz (Lee Ritenour, Patty Cantrell, George Benson and Al Jarreau), R&B/hip hop (Akon, Ne-Yo, Rihanna and Chris Brown), classical-pop (Josh Groban, Basil Dore), major female pop artists (Christina Aguilera, Beyonce) singer-songwriters (James Blunt, Babyface), not to mention surprise reunion gigs (Osmonds, Duran Duran) and one-off blasts from the past (Heads of Seagulls, Where to Home, Dave Loves Jeanie), among others.

This year, the Valentine week bill sports the following names: Scottish pop singer Sheena Easton (Feb. 12), the American group Hall Out Boy in a return engagement (Feb. 10), and ex-Chicago lead vocalist Peter Cetera (Feb. 14)—all at the Araneta Coliseum; and 1970s teen idol turned TV/stage actor Ben Smith (Feb. 12, the Mega Hotel).

Easton's shows will be her first in Manila. She broke into the scene with the hit single "You're Showing Signs," which was played heavily on local FM radio in the early '80s.

BY ROLANDO DE

SHOW TIME

A child of show biz, too

Mar Roxas traces family ties with entertainment industry

By Marinel R. Cruz

"WE SHOULD MAKE LOCAL PRODUCTS available to the global market," said Sen. Mar Roxas, replying to a question posed by reporters on how to improve the current state of the entertainment industry.

Roxas made the statement during a gathering of show biz writers in his Quezon City home on Monday night.

"Let's aim for foreign exhibition," he stressed. "This would mean bigger revenue for local producers. We watch shows produced by Korea, Mexico, Malaysia and Thailand. Let's make sure they watch our shows, too."

However, Roxas said, bigger funding is

A2/PAGE D1

Bono writes for New York Times

THE NEW YORK TIMES (NYT) has tapped U2's lead singer Bono as a guest columnist in its opinion-editorial pages. For his first piece, which appeared in the Jan. 9 issue, Bono wrote about banging out in a pub in Dublin on New Year's Day, and proceeded to discuss the sound at the pub and hearing Frank Sinatra on the speakers—relating the experiences that people had about the future to the quality of Sinatra's voice: "In the new rolls were [and with it many comments], the emotion in the room turns into hope and from expectation and inspiration. Whatever you end up, his voice takes you by the hand..."

CHEER FACTOR

Aaaaab-cbooooooo!

SINGAPORE—MY TALKATIVE recently caught a cold, signaling that inevitably, I'd soon be down with the sniffles and a slight sore throat. That was exactly what happened.

At the start of last week, I had a sore throat, and I'd hazard you morning the scratchy of emotion in the sacred books. Clears my head, sure, but it can't last when it happens.

Oh, we're completely well-rested by the way.

It's unfortunate that this last bout with the common cold took place during my run as Cinderella. Perhaps I should be thankful that it's the show I'm doing, and not "Les Miserables" or, even worse, "Miss Saigon." Still, Rodgers and Hammerstein, the sniffles don't get you down.

Having said that, there is still quite a bit of difficulty performing when one's nose is congested and the head's a little loopy not to mention that little in the throat which threatens to turn into a coughing fit in the middle of a song. So, it has happened, and I hate it when it does.

BACK STORY

Lea Salonga

A threatening cough

So how does one carry on despite the possibility of an onstage cough attack? Bravery carefully

AAAAAAH-CHOOOOOOO/ D2

Our brief conversations with the singer-wife of our musical director gave me a hint: Take shallow breaths and sing light, as light as you can. A deep breath can sometimes trigger a cough action (odd) seemingly an end in sight), so keeping things shallow and easy is a good idea. Shouting off with long phrases won't help; if I have to eat things in half or take things down seconds, I do.

At another show I did many years ago (also here in Singapore, actually), many glasses of water were laid out on stage and off for my leading man and myself. That got us through a rough illness patch, and helped us complete our four-week run.

Another problem I have when I'm sick is the endless nose-blowing.

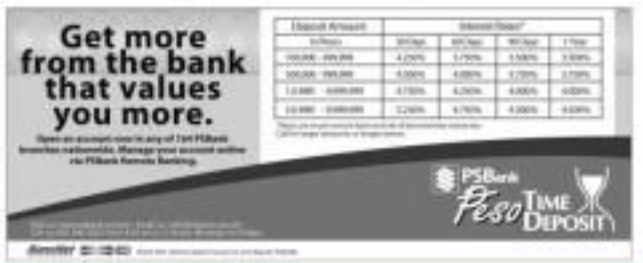
Amy Winehouse's hubby seeks divorce, cites adultery

LONDON—THE HUSBAND OF troubled Grammy Award-winning British singer Amy Winehouse is seeking a divorce on the grounds of her adultery, his lawyer Henri Brandman said Monday.

The couple married in Miami in May 2007.

The 25-year-old songstress was pictured last week in British newspapers by the arm of a little-known 23-year-old British actor, Jack Bowman, while on holiday in St. Lucia.

AFP



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5 LOVE ME AGAIN
6 BRIDE WARS
7 THE SPIRIT
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9 DESPERADAS 2
10 ANG TANGING INA N'YONG LAHAT

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1 THE CURIOUS CASE of BENJAMIN BUTTON
2 HAUNTING OF MOLLY HARTLEY
3 BRIDE WARS
4 BEDTIME STORIES
5 LOVE ME AGAIN
6 TRANSPORTER 3
7 THE SPIRIT
8 DESPERADAS 2
9 ANG TANGING INA N'YONG LAHAT

METRO EAST

1 LOVE ME AGAIN
2 BRIDE WARS
3 HAUNTING OF MOLLY HARTLEY
4 THE CURIOUS CASE of BENJAMIN BUTTON
5 BEDTIME STORIES
6 TRANSPORTER 3
7 ANG TANGING INA N'YONG LAHAT
8 LOVE ME AGAIN

NOVALICHES

1 LOVE ME AGAIN
2 BRIDE WARS
3 ANG TANGING INA N'YONG LAHAT
4 BEDTIME STORIES

PIONEER

1 BEDTIME STORIES
2 HAUNTING OF MOLLY HARTLEY
3 BRIDE WARS
4 LOVE ME AGAIN

STA. ROSA

1 LOVE ME AGAIN
2 BRIDE WARS
3 DAYO
4 BEDTIME STORIES

LIPA

1 LOVE ME AGAIN
2 ANG TANGING INA N'YONG LAHAT
3 BEDTIME STORIES
4 DAYO

DASMARINAS

1 LOVE ME AGAIN
2 BEDTIME STORIES
3 BRIDE WARS
4 THE SPIRIT

IMUS

1 LOVE ME AGAIN
2 BRIDE WARS
3 BEDTIME STORIES
4 TRANSPORTER 3

ANGELES

1 LOVE ME AGAIN
2 BEDTIME STORIES
3 PASSENGERS
4 FOUR CHRISTMASES

STARMILLS

1 LOVE ME AGAIN
2 BEDTIME STORIES
3 ANG TANGING INA N'YONG LAHAT
4 DESPERADAS 2
5 SNAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL X
6 FOUR CHRISTMASES

BACOLOD

1 LOVE ME AGAIN
2 BEDTIME STORIES
3 ANG TANGING INA N'YONG LAHAT
4 THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL
5 PRIDE AND GLORY
6 FOUR CHRISTMASES

ILOILO

1 LOVE ME AGAIN
2 BEDTIME STORIES
3 THE CURIOUS CASE of BENJAMIN BUTTON
4 ANG TANGING INA N'YONG LAHAT
5 PASSENGERS
6 SEX DRIVE

Aaaaab-chooooooo!

From page D1

relative can't really do much of when it's onstage in a musical or a play. The luxury of time paper is one I can't take with me. I even remember once flying across my face as I did a combo of choice curses. See pretty.

All I can do at this point is pray, meet on quietly as I can and swallow. I know, it's gross. But what else can I do?

To meditate, or not to meditate?

If I'm seriously in a show, I take something that won't dry me out or make me feel drowsy or worse, loooooooze. There are a few cold formulations that have that sealed effect on me, making a show feel relieved like an out of body experience. I can't focus, I feel tired, and I don't have full control of my performance. In this instance, I take some herbal tea that contains slippery elm to help my throat feel better, and an herbal remedy that helps with the post-nasal drip. I also sometimes use a neti pot (a small pot used for nasal irrigation) or a saline nasal spray to clean out my sinuses.

The best thing, of course, is to just stay healthy to keep your immune system strong, in order to fight the occasional oh-shoo and ahh-ahh. A healthy lifestyle is key to keeping that cold and cough away.

Correction

In my last article, I mistakenly called Iggy Cheal's wife Shalira. Her name is actually Janice. Sorry about that!

Condolences

To all the loved ones of Anabel Rinde. May she now rest in peace or wish it not to close eternal grip of grips.

A child of show biz, too

From page D1

needed to come up with products that most global standards, and "that's where government can help."

Roxas thanked his guests for their "continued support. "The entertainment industry contributed [in] a big way[ ] to my family's success. My late Uncle Ernie Arnedo Sr.[ ] was a producer of live shows and movies," he said. "In my public career, a lot of you also helped me in one way or another by writing about my work."

He said during the gathering at Bahay na Pari on E Tuazon in Cubao (next door to the family-owned Arnedo Collegian) was Roxas' girlfriend, broadcaster Korina Sanchez, his mom Judy Arnedo, sister Kit, sons Baby Roxas, and cousins Venus and cousin Margarita. Guests enjoyed a sumptuous buffet.

The 46-year-old senator (full name: Manuel Arnedo Roxas II) was of course asked about marriage plans, but he remained tight-lipped on the subject.

He merely said, "We've been together for five years. Marriage will come in its own time. Right now we're in a good place. I continue to be in love with her, and hopefully she loves me as much."

As for his rumored intent to run in the 2010 presidential race, he was not shy about his qualifications: "I have an impeccable track record. I have a wide experience dealing with the private sector. I've been part of the executive branch when I was a Cabinet member, of the legislative branch when I was in Congress and now, in the Senate."

The writers insisted, what's keeping them from tying the knot? His candidly worded reply: "We're no longer in high school, we have many considerations. We need to balance our time for family and career. Marriage shouldn't be the issue here. What's important is, we're together and we're very happy."

Roxas said his relationship with Sanchez lasted because they were committed in making time for it. "We enjoy watching movies," said the senator. The last film Sanchez they saw, he said, was Gavin O'Connor's "Pride and Glory," starring Edward Norton and Colin Farrell.

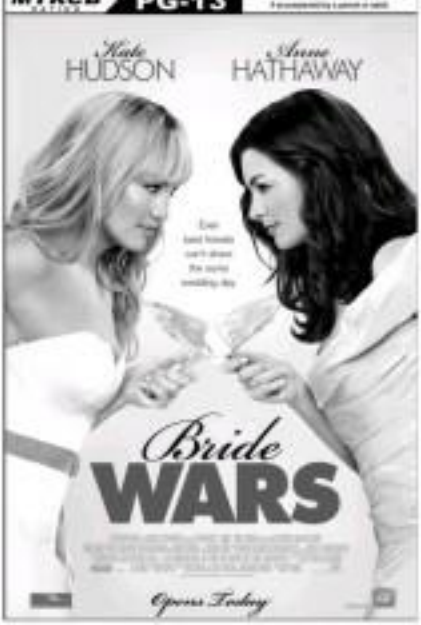
"We saw the rating out. Two nights ago, we rented movies and drove to Roxas's and then to Alfonso Arnaiz to have] two. Quality time is very important to us. Between Christmas and New Year, I made it a point to not take calls or make any appointments."

Openness is also very important, Roxas said. "Korina not only knows about my 15-year-old son, we all agree last Christmas together."

WINGS PG-13

OPENS TODAY

MTRCB PG-13



RP-bound foreign acts in early '09

Frontpage D1

In 1984 she collaborated with Prince and had the biggest-selling album of her career, "Private Dancer," which yielded the dance smash "Let's."

At the point of her fame, Easton had a sexy siren image. We wonder how she looks today and whether her stage act would suit the kind of songs she's always been identified with.

Fall Out Boy's return after only a year may mean that its pronounced multi-good money from the earlier gig, also at the Big Dome. In this case, the band was quite impressive for its frenetic performance level. In addition, interest in FOB has been sustained with the release of a new album, "Folie de Deux."

Green was a bass player when he joined Oakapp, whose roots in 1967 combined rock and jazz. Along with keyboardist Robert Lamm and guitarist Terry Kath, Green showcased as vocalist in some of the band's songs, notably "25 or 6 to 4." He became the lead singer during the band's pop hit-

lade phase from 1970. ("If You Leave Me Now," "Baby What a Big Surprise") till he quit the group in 1980 and pursued a successful solo career. Green's Valentine's show is his debut gig in Manila. What's interesting, a rival he'll be singing with is 42 years younger.

As for Smith, he's reprising his old fun for his 6th visit to the country...the tour is a small venue, targeting the hotel dinner crowd. Mounting smaller gigs for several reno acts has become a trend for local promoters who don't want to risk big bucks at big venues because the concert crowd appears to have become fickle.

Nagging question

But since there will always be a market for foreign shows, the nagging question is, why can't PH talents who can afford pricey tickets enjoy more major live acts from different eras?

In the past, we got to watch the likes of Ike Aral, Metallica and Sting who were, incidentally at the peak of their careers when they played here.

Sometime ago, the bayanihan-related concert promoter why he can't, for instance, bring in a novelty hit even act like the Eagles. His answer: "The band's asking price is $1 million."

If it seems handwriting 9/27 and, hm, then that's just a bit more than half of what a telenovela com-

pany was said to have spent recently to sponsor the back-to-back gigs of two young black R&B superstars.

Or, turned out to be the biggest concert in recent years, with a record attendance of about 60,000.

'The Haunting of Molly Hartley'

The Devil is coming to collect your souls

Rizzane Woodard / Inquirer Elite

The devil lurks beneath the lush surfaces of teenaged girl's private school world – and it holds the rights to her very soul. Now, on the eve of her 18th birthday, Molly Hartley is about to discover the truth of just who, or rather what, it is she is destined to become...

"When the devil comes to collect souls not even god can help", says Mickey Liddell, director of "The Haunting of Molly Hartley"

The Haunting of Molly Hartley' stars 'Gossip Girl' heartthrob Chace Crawford and sexy teen star Haley Bennett.